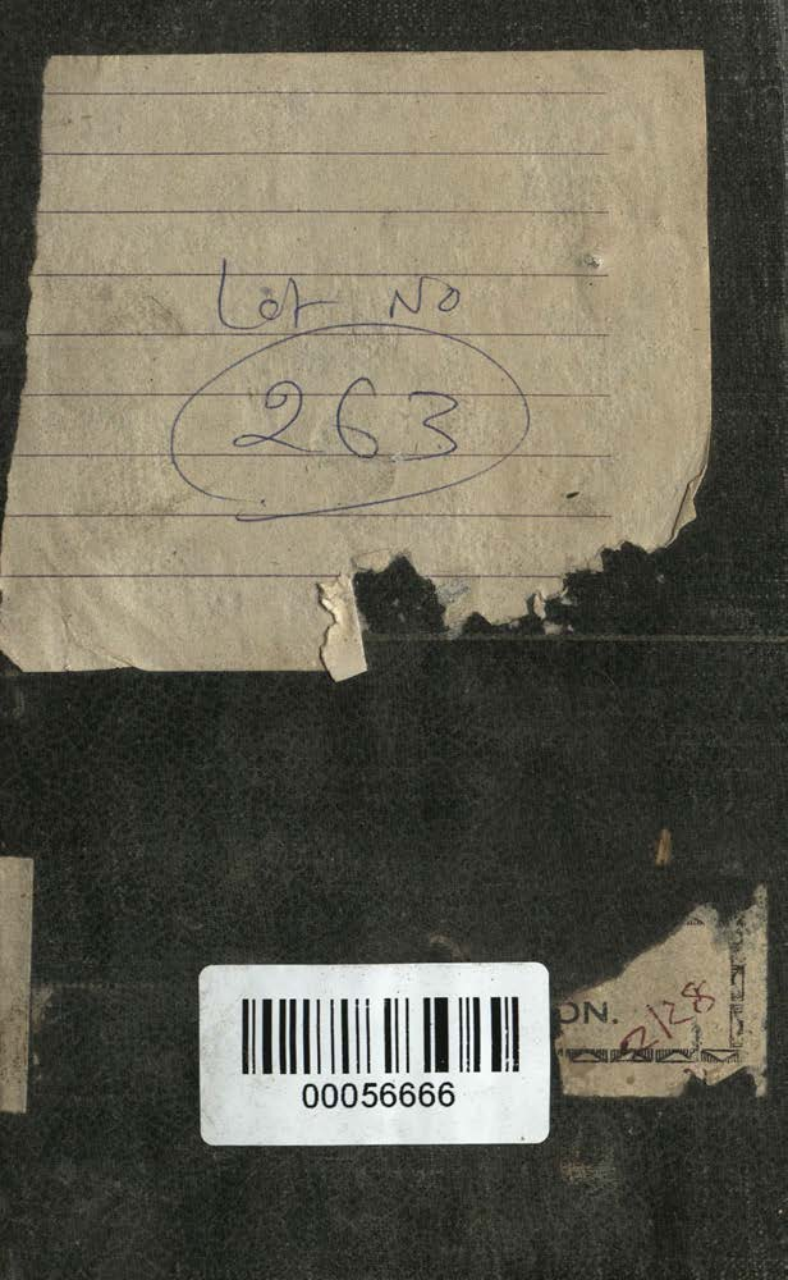
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THE FRENCH AND THE ENGLISH

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By
LAURENCE JERROLD

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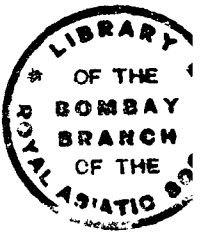
NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION



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THE ENGLISH

I

THE ENGLISH

MEN know themselves little, peoples know themselves less. Probably of all peoples the French is the least ignorant of itself, the English the most. The actor is only human when he fancies himself most in the part in which he had to be least himself. A man often plumes himself precisely on being what he is not; a sensitive child will often hate himself for what he is. Peoples are like the man and the child; perhaps the English is the most manlike in its mistaken vanities and the most childlike in its shy shrinkings, and the French at the opposite pole the least self-questioning and the most reasonably conceited, though even the French is not infallible about itself. National consciousness is fitful and broken like the flashes of consciousness in instinctive animal life. Peoples seem seldom to use the flashes to good purpose; they may feel, they rarely reason, rightly about themselves. A man or a faction having wrested a hearing becomes by right or might a people's mouthpiece; this is a flash of national consciousness. The mouthpiece speaks out a people's destiny and character, and commonly pronounces wrong. The mistake becomes an axiom against which the people's instinct has a hard fight.

Peoples choose or accept representative men and representative ideas that do not represent them rightly. Bismarck never spoke rightly for the German people, but his voice drowned all others. Napoleon never spoke for the French, but they were dumb while he roared as only he could roar. Every thinking person

acknowledges that our own much softer-spoken representative men of to-day are remarkably un-English.

To-day Germany calls herself, or is called by the faction of the German people which Europe listens to, the paragon of brute strength; but some part of the world wonders whether what is most curious in her, and perhaps pathetic, be not her animal weakness, and whether the rising brain-power of revolt be not more interesting in her than the sodden mentality of discipline. She waves her mailed fist, but her best contributions to the serious thought of to-day have been curious studies and fine examples of interesting intellectual disease, and her iron organisation is her boast, but she may be applying her gifts of method and combination to the sure though slow planning of social revolution. The United States of to-day, as everybody knows, roar out their energy; does it amount in matters of fact, in things of the body, in things that pay money, to much more than the meek toiling of middle-class England which nobody talks about? There is an American more subtle than energetic, not blunt but morbidly delicate, shrinking, not go-ahead, worshipping the past and shy of the future, not conquering but receptive, a man who less than a European thinks of breaking new ground, and who more than an Englishman clings to the most anciently trodden soil. Some call him the best American, others the played-out American; is he not the real American? He certainly is, taken in his surroundings, a more original type than the strenuous American. There are few finer examples of a nation misunderstanding itself than glorious Walt Whitman, who thought he was, whom perhaps America (certainly some Europeans) took to be, America, spontaneous, free, savagely poetic, madly common. He never saw the really original America, deliberate, traditional, self-analytical, and furiously refined.

Mr. Henry James is not all the real America, but he is much more the real America than Walt Whitman was. Perhaps an observer without preconceived ideas will find that the most important characteristic of America to-day is subtlety. Not Russia but the factions that rule the Russian people think the Russian people nothing if not practical; one of the factions went to Manchuria solely for the purposes of a great practical constructive policy, though one would not guess so from the results. The faction of the social democrats thought they were the only true founders of the one and only new Social-Democratic State of the world at the revolution, and most probably think so still, undismayed by their achievements. The Italy of to-day hates the name of artist and admires herself for her delightful tramcars. France, the realist, often calls herself the idealist among nations when a fit of self-consciousness comes on.

Probably the most misunderstood of nations in political history, the English, is the nation that misunderstands itself the most. If we don't know ourselves we can't expect others to know us. As a body politic we are fulsomely buttered up for our smaller virtues and savagely slanged for our minor vices, and on the whole we accept both verdicts meekly. We have been called the Romans of to-day or the pirates of to-day; we have never cried out at the absurdity of both comparisons, but have merely protested diffidently that both were exaggerated. We have never even really denied that we are "a nation of shopkeepers," at any rate we have never flung back that we are a nation of poets. For the worst mistake of the English nation is to overrate its prose and ignore its poetry, to overrate its material and underrate its spiritual worth, to overrate its fist, its money-bags, its solidity, its "sturdy practical common sense," its "firm grasp of life."

A sense of life is precisely not one of our national virtues. We dream admirably of ways how not to live, no people more finely ; ways of living we are not good at thinking out. The French sometimes make the contrary mistake and persuade themselves that their darling sin is idealism, being all the while great realists. We prize our poor realism and not our rich dreams. These we call trifling ripples on the national consciousness, whereas they are deep waves in the national mind. We understand neither that they come from the depths of our character, nor that, even were they only on the surface, they would still be interesting. We understand them neither from the inside nor from the out. The average England admires herself for her strength and her sense, the strength of her Imperialists and her Boy Scouts, the sense of her City men. She does not care about her cranks, her faddists, her zealots, her fanatics, her madmen, her paradox mongers, her poets. She does not understand either that they have a particular interest for her because they are national, or that they are interesting in themselves. She calls them either a bubble, or a bore, or a plague. That there is any use or virtue in them has never dawned upon her ; she has not the least idea that they make her great.

Our real power is not material, our real power in the world is our mind, our peculiar mind ; not our reason, our reasoning or our logic—for in those compartments of the mind the force in the world belongs to the French people—but our fancy, our imagination, our folly, our poetry. Does England often reflect that she rules in the world by her poetry ? Does literary England often understand that the poetry we rule by in the world is not merely our verse, but the twists of our thought ? We are poets not only in the written word ; we are poets in many turns and conceits of our lives, in our fads, our dreams, our prejudices, our

perversities, our cracked-brainedness. We are poets, and mad poets. Does England ever admire herself for her poetry and her madness, and does she not usually plume herself on her brute sense? Sense is what we have not; poetic madness is what has made us great.

It must inevitably be the strong and absurd desire of an Englishman who looks at England—and the desire must be strongest though not necessarily most absurd when he looks at her from afar—to have the power to make her look at herself. A man who loved a woman has sometimes hated her, because she loved herself for what she was not and he loved her for what she was. Perhaps he was wrong, and perhaps her charm for him was that she did not know herself. Perhaps the charm and the power of England are her unconsciousness. Should we like her less if she knew herself better? There is something, indeed, either unpleasantly soft or unpleasantly hard in the self-knowledge of some other peoples. The individual mystical Russian who tells you with a good deal of slightly slimy relish, "Ah! how whimsical we are," the Frenchman who never tells you but who jolly well knows how sharp he is, have charms of their own, not the charm of the Englishman who hasn't the slightest idea what he is. But English unconsciousness to be pleasant must be perfect; the slightest lapse is fatal. In the rare moments when England does try self-analysis she always analyses herself wrong. England is not only wrong about herself, but incoherent and inconsistent. Other peoples make mistakes about themselves, but consistent mistakes; they have, if not knowledge, definite theories of themselves. The German, the Spaniard, even the Russian, form consistent images of themselves: efficiency, chivalry, sensitiveness. The Frenchman's practical knowledge of himself is excellent, his theory of himself is not as real but logical. He knows that he is a reasoner

and an artist, he argues that he is an idealist and a sentimentalist as well: this is a wrong but at least a consistent reading. He imagines that his natural bent for abstraction makes him an idealist, because he cannot conceive an idealism that is not of the intelligence; he also, though less often, calls himself sentimental because he does not conceive a sentiment to spring from aught save some such an instinct of living as governs him. An irrational idealism not in harmony but in conflict with reason, and sentiment not in harmony but in conflict with the will to live, he either does not know, or learning of them even denies.

Perhaps the greatest mistake we make about ourselves is to think ourselves solid and believe ourselves dull. The intelligent foreigner, who has come to us and got beyond the traditional misconceptions of political history, considers us on an average mad and is surprised to find us as solid as we are, considering how mad we are; there is a great deal of truth in his view. To him we appear astonishingly steady in the mass and wonderfully unbalanced in the individual. To ourselves we do not generally seem mad. We hold ourselves, in fact, to be the standard of sanity in the world. The attitude of some of us towards other peoples proves this by implication. Two broad types of behaviour are observed among Englishmen who make a practice of going to other nations for excitement: cursing and gushing. I have met many in whom one or the other is habitual. The man who roars for whisky in the Médoc, where he has been given the choicest classed growths to sip, and the man who takes his London Havanas with him to Holland where he could save fourpence apiece on the same cigars, are of the damning temper. They travel with their own drinks and smokes in their luggage, but not with the sense of their own picturesqueness within them. They travel to find higher excitement

in cursing than at home, where they only grumble. Every un-English way of doing things throws them constantly into an enjoyable fury. They carry the English standard of doing everything with them, test everything by it and joyously damn everything for not conforming to it. Italian laziness, German boorishness, French lewdness, keep them constantly excited. Modern Italy they wipe out, because modern Italians have no right to exist. In Berlin they live battlemented with British grit among a hostile population ready to besiege them, and delight in the state of siege. France fills them with particular rage and contempt: no French wife is faithful, every Frenchman is lecherous, every French politician is bought, all French governments are incompetent, every French striker is an anarchist, every French trooper is an anti-militarist, and every French gun is spiked. They live among the French in constant fury and relish it; they wouldn't be happy if the French reformed and they had nothing left to curse at.

This temper might be called "jingoism" in the damning Englishman; but it is not that wholly, or even in great part. It is mainly the curious British impulse to seek excitement away from home, which often takes the physical form of big-game hunting. The moral excitement of stamping among other peoples and bringing them up with a cudgel the way they should go, is perhaps even greater—certainly more varied. Colonies of elderly English ladies with limited means and pensioned English colonels live in Naples, apparently for the purpose of condemning Neapolitan squalor. That is a life of keen excitement. The colonels and the elderly ladies might have stayed at home and found there the same occupation, but home is dull—the fatal flaw of home. The traveller with a temper might have gone to Tottenham Court Road, to Holywell Street that was, to Villiers Street of to-day,

to the Divorce Court, might have peered behind some English political scenes, have watched one or two English strikes—but all that was dull home, dull and undramatic. Abroad is the excitement, and London editors frantically dun their foreign correspondents for what American editors (London editors not yet, but they will come to it) call "hot stuff."

The excitement of gushing is perhaps as enjoyable as that of cursing. It is also a peculiarly British enjoyment. No other nation knows it except in very faint and rare forms. A very few Americans are very English, but they are Americans of purely English stock. A handful of North Germans assimilate English manners wonderfully well, but you will find more energetic love of country among them, perhaps, than among Bavarian bourgeoisie. I have met several Italians whose Anglicism was delightful to a patriotic Englishman and sincere; but touch the right chord and they are true Italians. The Frenchman loves the London policeman and is enthusiastic over German railways, but not one returns to France (even after cursing his own peculiarly offensive customs' officers at the frontier) without a sudden glow of filial fondness for the pleasant land. One sort of man is unique in the world: the type of Englishman who ceases to grumble the moment the channel steamer has landed him on the continent, and grumbles again as soon as he is back home. How can a man among us call ourselves unpicturesque when we have two such types? We ought to pride ourselves as much on the ecstatic as on the damning Englishman. The one is as picturesque as the other, and both go from home seeking the picturesque. The one basks as gladly as the other rages, and worships with the same delight with which he might curse if he were of another temper. He lands at Boulogne, and a little open-air café throws him into an ecstasy. He could sit there all day with an

absinthe before him, which he always calls, of course, a parrot, to be quite French—French of the days of Musset. What life! What amiability! What vivacity! What human saneness! "We have nothing like it. I could sit here all day and love myself and everybody else. When I get back to Charing Cross I shall feel back in a dully mad world. Here is the only brightly sane life."

Now, it seems clear that our tourists, our journalists, our humourists would not go abroad for the picturesque, the dramatic, the quaint, if they found it at home. They prove that they have not understood ourselves to be as picturesque and as dramatic as other nations, and perhaps even quainter. A curious flaw in our imagination is that it answers to calls from other peoples, and is deaf to the same coming from our own. Every unfamiliar thing is wonderful to every man, but the same defect is far less in the imagination of other peoples, particularly the French, who are almost as quick to perceive their own picturesqueness as that of other nations. We have an old habit of ignoring what in ourselves should appeal to our imagination, and resignedly patting our solidity on the back. Our reason is acquired, and fancy is our instinct: we have only learnt to be reasonable; we have forgotten that we are whimsical naturally.

Often acutely self-conscious individually, we are charmingly unconscious, as a rule, in the mass. The rudeness of the Englishman, as he is known typically abroad, really is, of course, his shyness. He is very much afraid lest he should elbow his way into other people's lives, and he therefore treads on their toes. The haughty, the arrogant, the insolent Englishman known to foreigners is the timid, shrinking, restrained man who is only too conscious of himself. He is a man among men whom for the world he would not get mixed

up with, as he hates the idea of possibly intruding upon them. But in the mass we seem to be charmingly unconscious. Self-consciousness is not self-knowledge, and the man who calculates his own movements so nicely that he treads upon other people's toes in his strong efforts to avoid them does not prove that he has measured his powers accurately; but to be self-conscious is at least to wish to know one's self. The men of several other nations seem to be conscious of their own selves the less as their nations have thought themselves out the more. The man is not shy because his nation has thought its place out, and his place out for him into the bargain; he does not tread upon other people's toes, because he knows instinctively where to put his feet. Is it because his people has measured its stand and plumbed its attitude? The attitude of the shy Englishman among other men is curious. He shrinks and he tramples; he is the most brutal and the most delicate of individuals. It is as if he were alternately not sure and too sure of him and his, as if he said to himself alternately, "What am I?" and "God's truth, after all I am an Englishman"; were alternately doubtful whether England really exists and assured that one Englishman can lick two Germans, three Frenchmen, and four Italians. Very few men of other nations possess the same contrasts and unite the same diffidence with the same bland brutality, the same insolence with the same tender sensitiveness. No Italian was ever as quiet or as loud, no Frenchman as discreet or as blundering, no German as reserved or as brutal, no Russian as subtle or as savage as an Englishman can be. No one has ever met trippers of any nation behaving as violently as ours. I, for one, have never found anywhere a more finely adjusted outlook upon the world than I have sometimes among my countrymen.

Yet they are not sure of themselves. The man of

almost every other nation, even of a nation which, judged by any standard, is below ours, is surer of himself. If one of the most repellant sights of Europe is the Britisher asserting his insularity, one of the most affecting sights is the real, thoughtful, well-tempered Englishman apologising for England. Why should he excuse his country? His only reason can be that his country does not know itself, any more than he knows his country. It seems as if men of other nations were backed by a national self-consciousness. They need not know themselves; their country has thought itself out, and spared its sons the trouble of thinking themselves out: a nation's self-consciousness saves patriotic self-consciousness in the individual.

THE FRENCH

II

THE FRENCH

THE French probably know themselves better than we know ourselves. A conceit in us might tempt us to say that this is because there is less to know, and under one aspect it would not be a quite groundless conceit. There indeed is more of us to know than there is of the French; whether a third party would find it as well worth knowing a return of meekness may make us wonder. We cover more ground, is there as much thickness of us to penetrate? We certainly present the greater variation, we have wider extremes, we spread ourselves further, we think more and we think less, we are madder and duller, more heavenly and more Boeotian, we have greater poets and greater fools. The French stand more together, for they all stand, those of them that fly sometimes, and those that at times grovel. They stand together a compact and intellectually coherent people, the most homogeneous in Europe, let alone America. That they should know themselves better than we know ourselves cannot surprise us if we have understood them in the slightest degree. Their variations are of course superficial compared with ours; their excesses, their waywardness, their perversities, their madness are accidents, peculiarities, twitches of manner. When we are mad we have madness in the blood. They are mad in flourishes of character, and the character remains sane at bottom. Almost conversely one can say that when we are dull, we are dull through and through, whereas if I may quote myself, "even the pillars of French society have intelligence."

The people that is on the whole the sanest in the world must know itself fairly well, and it does. It is not the most self-analysing, certainly not the most self-conscious of people (perhaps we are the latter), but it is the people with the best instinctive knowledge of itself. It is the one that feels itself best. It is the one in which all classes stand together and best understand each other. It is not a startling thing to the French that the French navvy and M. Anatole France talking together should speak almost the same language, using for such purposes very nearly the same words, very much the same expressions and the same accent of speech barring a few nice shades; correct a slightly slurred vowel here and there, and one or two imperfectly grammatical idioms, and the labourer's speech is the Academician's. It does startle the French that a London clerk should not speak the same tongue even as his employer, that a West End tradesman and his West End customer speak differently, that a costermonger and an undergraduate speak two entirely different languages. The speaking of the French tongue is the first noticeable link that binds the French people. What barriers can the Marseilles, the Bordeaux, the Picardy, the Normandy, even the Alsatia accent set up, compared with the dropping of an "h" and "lidy"? Our dozens of tongues from original cockney, blended cockney, smart cockney to pulpit accents and the shout of the woman of fashion, leaving out all provincial burrs and twangs, have no counterparts in French. That you should tell from a man's speech whether he has been to a University, that a carefully self-cultivated man should in a moment of excitement drop an "h" and damn himself, that a chorus-girl taught by a stage manager should talk on and off the stage two different tongues, seems incredible in France. It requires years of knowledge of the French language to detect the

shades which mark differences of class; to a foreigner, even calling himself an old Parisian, a Parisian shop-girl will pass for a duchess in her speech, and perhaps her manner also, for an hour or two. A foreigner in London with a hundred words of English may soon be able to tell a stockbroker's wife even from a banker's wife. Narrow differences of class and narrow or broad differences of set are not distinguishable in French at all. The aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, learned society, fast society, political society, official society, bankers, doctors, stock-brokers, business men, traders, journalists, and their wives and daughters, actors, actresses, the demi-monde, and even the demi-monde's mothers, all speak the same French language; the mere idea of observing that they do would amaze any Frenchman, for it would never occur to him that they might not.

The French world is homogeneous and each class has a consistent idea, not only of itself, but of the whole. Labourer, man of substance or man of thought, the Frenchman has formed for himself a picture of France. He awaits no surprises, expects no discoveries and believes in none; he has thought about his country, more perhaps felt about it, anyhow his country is a person to him. He knows her face, her voice, her gesture. He is not only a patriot, but a conscious patriot. He knows why he loves his country. The Englishman has not the least idea why he loves his. It requires a really thoughtful Englishman to have thought about his love of country; a little French shopkeeper will tell you why he loves France, and so tell you that he proves having to himself answered the question. He knows why he likes French ways of trading, strange as they may seem to outsiders. The French artist knows why he likes the grey green of French trees, the French philosopher why he likes the steely-blue of French philosophic thought, and the French bourgeois can tell you exactly

why he prefers the solid France among all other solid countries.

The business class, the hand-working class, the thinking class have each formed their picture of their country. Each one is finished, each one is varnished and under glass. That of the solidest class is the best varnished and most handsomely framed. The portrait is that of the only really sane country in the world. Here are delineated caution with just the sufficient dash of devilry, cool mind and hot senses nicely and properly balanced, really human reason, an instinct to hit upon what when all is said and done is the only really workable method of living, the type finally not of a great, sublime, exploring, but of the only real work-a-day humanity, that alone which all told gets out of life the best profit life has to give. The owner of the portrait does not pretend that it has great beauty, great intelligence, great will; but he is quite sure that a better everyday face can't be painted. If the eye had more of the fire of thought the lips might be too thin, if the lips were more sensitively curved the chin might be weaker, if the forehead were broadened the nose would probably be put out of joint. No feature could be improved without spoiling the whole; no detail in solid French life could be bettered without throwing the whole machinery out of gear. Solid France has thought about herself and come to the firm conclusion that among solid countries she is the standard. She has the secret and instinctive belief that all others have a touch of madness. The French bourgeoisie may rail at itself, but brought close to the bourgeoisie and the government of any other country, it will smell out some streak of insanity in them. It may shout that France is going to the dogs, but only because it has for France so extreme a standard of solidity that even France cannot always keep up to it. Other countries may be held up in theory

by the French bourgeoisie as patterns of stability, but chiefly because of what French eyes themselves read into other civilisations, for instance the English : much in England, if, and when, understood, dismays the French and they fall back upon their own sane country with relief. Their solidity is best proved by their persistent search for order ; we half enjoy chaos.

Thinking France pictures herself to herself not only by instinct, but by conscious, careful, often complacent effort. There is no thoughtful Frenchman who has not thought out the "French mind." Few of the most reflecting Englishmen have reflected upon England ; a mystery to wonder at now and then is England to keen English minds, an inscrutable person to admire, love, curse, to take for granted, not to question, an enigmatic person of whom one says, "Thus is she ; why ? none can tell, but she is so." There never was an intellectual Frenchman who shrugging his shoulders said of France, "She is beyond me ; I love her but I can't make her out." It is we who shrug our shoulders at England, and worshipping our country "give it up like a riddle. The thinkers of France can always make France out. They have analysed her virtues, examined her vices to a certain degree. They know exactly what they love her for and have long since thought out apologies for those of her shortcomings to which they have after deliberate consideration agreed to confess. They naturally admire the French mind, which is theirs, but what is much more, they know precisely what it is, whereas we, fond and proud of the English spirit, are rarely capable of explaining it to any one. They know better than any one that clearness, reason, taste, balance are the first qualities of the French mind. In literature, art, science, philosophy "un-French" is a verdict of condemnation, "essentially French," one of approval. Who ever heard of a lin

of verse, a school of painting, a scientific hypothesis, a philosophic system condemned as "un-English"? The use of improved against out-of-date fire-arms is "un-English"; a stage innuendo to which public notice has accidentally been drawn may be un-English. The condemnation is not applied more philosophically than that. "Un-French" means antagonistic to a whole scheme of the universe. Blank verse, often attempted in French, has as often been branded un-French. So great an artist in one art as Puvis de Chavannes was annoyed by as great or a greater one in another, Wagner, because he found Die Walküre contrary to the French spirit, and Ibsen was long dismissed because he was radically un-French. A scientific theory built with the aid of some imagination upon pure induction unverified by deduction is un-French because unsound. Most mystic philosophies leave the French mind uneasy; it may dabble in them, but after all they are un-French and it generally emerges from them with relief. To talk of French "insularity," or as Bjornstjerne Bjornson did to call the French the Chinese of Europe, is easy and loose. What is better worth observing is that if the French intelligence be insular, it owns the tightest little intellectual isle in the world and that if it have built walls round itself it knows exactly what is going on within them. That is more than can be said of an insularity which doesn't know itself like ours. The French mind knows that it thinks clearly, judges synthetically, tastes delicately and sees keenly; it may not want to do more than it does but it knows what it can do.

The French claims to be the most human mind, perhaps justly. We should note this thing, that we who govern a great part of the world have fashioned a very small part of the world to our intelligence. Where we rule, our presence by our instinct rules; our mind, which is first of all poetic, is never the means by which

we rule. There is poetry in our fresh and unthinking pioneers, but only the reflective, not they, can see it, and the last thing they would think of would be that they should spread the English intelligence. The French, with infinitely less ruling influence, have permeated the world much more with their mind than we have with ours.

The English intelligence does not soak into others; the English mental outlook is not ready for others to share. An English brain seems to want English blood to quicken it, English mentality to suppose English eyes. English influence in the world is spread only by Englishmen; where the Englishman stops, English influence ceases. If the English spirit is spread over the world it is because the Englishman has gone over the world in the flesh: his spirit has not gone beyond him. America is English where American blood is English; the English intelligence never soaks into Irish or German America. Canada is English in so far as Canadians are of English stock. French Canadians use and like the English public spirit, the English mind remains foreign to them. Australia and New Zealand we have broadly made English because we have peopled them: we seem to Anglicize only where we people. In governing India, we have done a work which, with all its faults, is the greatest of its kind known; but India is as impervious as ever to the English mentality. Is the whole world impervious to our thought? Can the English way of thinking come only to the English brain? Are we indeed a splendidly-isolated people, intellectually?

The French mind has touched other minds immediately. No important people has spread physically so little in the world, and none has had a greater mental influence. France stays at home and sends her ideas abroad; we colonise with our hands, and where our ideas of freedom and of government have grown, we set

them in the soil ourselves. The mind of France is different from ours in that it is more purely mind, whereas ours is closer to our sentiment and our senses. Senses and sentiment may give physical hegemony, but intelligence penetrates the world. French reason has disciplined a hundred minds for one that English poetry has set dreaming. If the mind that penetrates the greatest number of human minds be the most human, the French is the most human.

Even the French mind, which knows itself so well, is not infallible about itself, but even in its self-misunderstandings it is consistent; we do not misunderstand ourselves consistently. The mistakes the French make about themselves are almost solely political; those we make about ourselves are generally not political. The French create for their own amusement a turmoil of political strife, and, having created it, find a further pastime in damning it. We abide quietly after all by our political life, and do not question it. But the French, before their political, always posit their real life, which is all that essentially matters to them; we have a dream that only our political life matters. The mistakes we make about ourselves are thus chiefly mistakes about our real lives; we ignore our fancy, our poetry and our spirit. Our politics we understand superficially well, the daily moves, each small detail of tactics. The French persistently twist themselves up in their political games, but strike the straight line in the business of their lives; they imagine a thousand vain things when they look at themselves as a politic body, but when each family looks at itself it looks with clear-eyed reason. Even French political imagination is in fact consistent. The cry of "wolf," the fear of anarchy, in the most strongly organised state in the world, are only the bleatings of the lambs; the bourgeoisie calls upon protection and mastery only because it is already guided

and ruled by its own traditions. French society complains that it is shaky only because it is instinctively so solid, shivers with the fear of upheaval only because it knows its foundations so deep. We never feel the same political fears, for this, among other reasons, that we do not feel our lives rooted in the same reality. The French, in short, fear revolution more than we, because the average Frenchman has twice as much to lose by revolution as the average Englishman. French political alarm is more consistent than English individual incomprehension. The Frenchman loses his head over his politics, the Englishman ignores his own life. And social revolution may come sooner in the country of political complacency and individual impulse than in that of political nerves and individual system.

The mistakes we make about the French and the mistakes the French make about us are characteristic of both peoples. Every one knows that our first blunder is to call Frenchmen feather-brained and the first French blunder is to call us matter-of-fact. The former comes from our honest delusion that the individual Englishman is the standard of common sense for the world and the latter from the half-belief, half-pretence of the French that they are a people swayed by political sentiment. We share at the outset the mistake the French make about themselves and suppose them whimsical politically, but we carry the misunderstanding further and imagine them fantastic through and through in their own lives, and no Frenchman can ever go so wrong about himself as to think himself that. We are well persuaded that particularly our political methods are the only sane methods; those of the French immediately appear to us fanciful because we do not understand that mere common sense is not the first thing the French ask for in politics. It takes us a long time to discover that in their lives they are greater realists than we. The

French at the outset gaze with admiration upon the solid frontage of our political and social fabric. There are no ornaments here, consequently no weak spots. They are deluded by familiarity with the amusements of their own political games: here is no amusement, therefore no game, all is hard business. The truth is, on the contrary, that French games of politics are more earnest than ours; ours are only more solemn. English houses seem to the Frenchman as solid as the English political fabric. English private lives as business-like as English public life. He is remarkably soon undeceived. When he gets to know the English, in three weeks, he at once comes to his final conclusion: we are sane in the mass and mad in the individual. He makes this discovery much sooner than we that of the sanity of French lives. It seems to be a discovery much easier to make; it is the thick French wall of reserve that is hard to break through, once reached behind the gay creepers hiding it.

But there is a discovery which the French are even slower at making than we are at finding out French solidity. I am sorry to say that scarcely any Frenchman can be got to believe in the poetry of the English mind. Some very few have discovered it. The others are even less easily persuaded of it than the average Englishman is, that the French have more common sense than we. The world in general denies poetry to the English character, partly perhaps because we don't own to it ourselves. The world in general acknowledges French reason, because the French themselves are the first to know they have it and to impart it.

LONDON

III

LONDON

OF all great towns London probably understands herself least. All others have learnt to know themselves more than she. We know them by what they have thought out and told us about themselves. The Londoner may have lived much of his life elsewhere, and London is still home to him as no other place can be ; but he knows Paris, Vienna, Rome . . . and London is still a mystery to him, because London is a mystery to herself. Paris to herself is as clear as day ; she has no doubts about herself, she may not know herself in every corner, but she has grasped what she is as a whole clearly, and any new discovery she may make about herself will fit into her general thought-out scheme ; any new discovery in London is an amazement to Londoners. Paris knows her various states of mind, her boulevards and her Marais, her Boul' Mich, and her learned oases, her cosmopolitan Champs Elysées and her dying Faubourg St. Germain, her mad American Montparnasse and her night cafés of English Montmartre. London does not know herself as well as a transparent place like Brussels knows itself. Some poet born within sound of Bow Bells should sing to her of herself, not of old London but of real London, cursing not modern London but false London. The streets of Paris have had better singers ; as good were deserved by the spontaneous streets of London that grew by themselves and found out their own way, dropping curious signs as they went, bookshops, chemists for lewd and realistic uses, strange " pubs,' and the strings of stucco houses that painted themselves with demure

whimsicalness chocolate, maroon, or dusty green. Such awful poems as London Wall, Cannon Street, Bishopsgate Street Within, and Without too if you like, such romantic as Shoreditch and Hoxton, such epic as Mile End Road, such tragic as West Kensington, such human as Bermondsey, want to be sung. Perhaps even the lullaby of Berkeley Square has not been yet cooed true. The tragic flower-hags, the puzzle and collar-stud men, the pathetic Tube liftmen, the last dying hansom cabman, have they any of them ever been sung? Has any poet even sung the society girl on the giggle and her infant mamma violently bright and amusing, the delicious drawing-room cynic, and the man who deplores that other people have no sense of humour? There should be also some full cursing of some modern London that is false London, and that proves in stone and bricks and mortar how little London understands herself.

Every Londoner ought to be taken round London by a Parisian discovering London. We should learn to look at streets and people with new eyes, and not to solve, but at least to consider, the problems of London. Why is London homelike? The Parisian could not tell him, but might (if sufficiently informed) point this curious thing out to him, that Paris to the Parisian is never exactly as homelike as London to the Londoner. The Parisian is always as much in love with Paris, and Paris is home to him, but if there were a French word for homelike it would not fit Paris. It fits such things in London as the old stucco houses, as the business-like railway stations, as sooty Somerset House, as the yellow Thames, so curiously well. Why can Florence be homelike and not Rome or Venice? Why can one imagine the word to suit Vienna and never by any means Berlin? Why does it seem the very word coined for poor plain London? The Londoner should ask himself the question. The Londoner discovering London should learn to be

astonished by everything he sees. There is a beautiful old moral tale of Eyes and No Eyes. The Londoner is No Eyes for London, the Parisian is all Eyes for Paris. No Eyes crosses London Town and sees a crowd in the Tube, his white, pink or green evening paper, and less rain than yesterday or more ; Eyes makes an amazing journey. He goes down one wide street and every house sets him wondering. In little front gardens, with dim, sealed up little houses behind, "Teas" hangs on a weak tree. Who ever has tea there ? Next door a brass plate says "Dentist" ; who, in this same little shut-up house with white blinds, at the top of the same little garden, ever has his teeth pulled out ? Over a plate-glass shop window is "Plumber, undertaker, removals, artistic house decoration," and within are coffins and tombstones. He thinks that no other people in the world treats death as we do. He passes cosy, mysterious houses, more secret than any in any other town, and strange temperance hotels, still with dead little front gardens, and he wonders whether there is anything like them anywhere else in the world. He walks down another street, without front gardens this time but with areas, and it is as wonderful. Sleek comfort keeping to itself was never so well written on a house front. In his dream each house is a fat cat, tabby, tortoiseshell—maroon or dusty green—purring to itself as it looks at the trees of the square where three people go a day. He understands at last that this is unique as almost everything is in London. He goes on to neat, clean and bright cottages with green woodwork, shiny brass, white curtains, and with not even an eye of a window open on to the street, and he finds these also unique. They are the picture of English gentility, funny but worthy of some respect. That is just how the English gentleman behaves and clothes himself, and these restrained shy house-fronts, hiding comfort that costs rent-rolls or

company promoting, are the image of the Englishman who roams calmly over the world. Fewer steps in London take the explorer from genteeler peace to a busier roar than in any other town in Europe. In the midst of it he finds the old women, the pavement artists, the kerb-stone pedlars that only London knows, quite quiet and resigned beside the rush. Once he might have met a string of sandwich men whose backs and chests were branded, " Watch the new hop," and whose legs did it steadily in the pouring rain. He comes upon the horrors of half-Haussmannised London. How could a town have misunderstood itself so badly ? Every other would have known better what suited it. The evil Haussmann did has lived after him in Paris, his ghost has done no good at all in London. The Avenue de l'Opéra can never be a pleasant street ; the destroyers of the old Strand proved utterly stupid ignorance of the character of London. They had not, no doubt, the slightest idea that London has or had any character at all. The explorer is glad of the Embankment, but sorry that no Londoner ever looks at the Thames, where the seagulls swarm screeching. No Parisian crossing the Pont des Arts but at least gives a glance upstream at the little Seine with its precious setting ; the kingly Thames is dead from Putney to the docks. Southwards the train takes the explorer over what how many Londoners understand to be the most tragic looking places in Europe ? The approaches to Paris are perhaps even more disagreeable because they have not the same richness of horror. Back, with the wonderful crowd in the Tube. There is no other like it in Europe, stolid, wooden, and yet living, ugly faces, bad teeth, silly eyes in plenty, more than in any other European town crowd, yet sometimes faces with a strange spirit and courage in them that have their exact like nowhere else. The faces go down into the

street in the steady rain to drink in the ugliest illuminations any honestly patriotic town ever put up to honour the close of an Imperial day, the brave feet tramp, the simple hands clap, the child voices cheer at the hideous colours and designs as the rain pours down. Keeping dry in their houses, the "better class" look once or twice out of window: "What a mob; miserable wretches—miserable idea of amusement." Whose fault is it the idea is miserable? Publicly deride London decorating herself and you are unpatriotic; admire what alone is worth admiring on a coronation night, the London crowd, and you are a simpleton.

The Parisian in London goes indoors and discovers a London Londoners have never seen. He had never dreamt of it himself. When he thinks of Paris, he might be looking far back at a little town by the river shore with peaceful citadel, coy and quiet. Here he is in such a storm as he had never imagined. He is tossed from dancing-girl to duchess, and all his social ideas go. Here, in this Conservatism, where there are several things "one never does," he finds so many things done that no one ever thought of doing in his far, demure, anarchist Paris. Where are classes, forms, morals here? A duchess is overjoyed to have a ballet girl to dinner, a "rapin" throws the handkerchief round like a pasha, dozens of peers called by the best-sounding Saxon or Norman names seem no more thought of than if they were money-lenders. Some actresses are too respectable to allow themselves to be seen in the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy; others, who have had as many lovers as any French "consoeur," peeresses run after. The language of drawing-rooms that really are the right thing sounds extraordinarily like that of bargees, with slight differences which the Parisian is not well-practised enough to distinguish. The duchess' girl friends are divorced in undefended suits, and the

duchess hails "promotion" when the co-respondents, bound to marry, are smarter than the ex-husbands. The Parisian feels himself in a wild whirl: he came from a village where duchesses never know actresses, where a wife can do anything but divorce, let alone be divorced, where "le monde" is one thing, and all that is not it is another thing. Here Lady Blanche Blank-Blank is delighted to dance in music-halls, while the husband she is supposed to have, and who never says a word, serves his country in the Foreign Office or the War Office. This is the great new London which the Parisian discovers and the Londoner has never noticed.

A dull London the Parisian expected—grey like the fog on the Thames, sleepy like steady London rain—and he finds himself thrown from excitement to excitement. The very word "excitement" is an English invention; no other people using Latin derivatives uses any kindred word in the same sense or as often. The Parisian finds that London Society lives only to be excited, and has only one principle of life, motion, bodily, or mental. Probably ten times as much mileage is done by London Society in motors or trains every week-end than the society of any other capital does in a season. The wild rush of every one, as if the devil drove, is what first of all amazes the Parisian. The fast people he knew at home thought it an immense sport to go down to the château for December after asking a carefully prepared list of guests. In England he is surprised to find that lists of invitations never take more than five minutes to prepare, and that no one is asked or answers except by telegram. The sedate slowness of Paris is what he looks back on now with astonishment. He came to meet a mentally deliberate London society, and finds it tumbling over itself to be quick.

He finds social revolution, customs in pieces, fashions beyond any Paris dares, ideas Paris has tired of, fads

in art, in music, in literature Paris dropped ten years ago, habits and manners Paris will not dream of yet ten years hence, some political crazes Paris has forgotten and some Paris has not yet thought of, and through all the jumble of new lamps and old, worn-out mental games and anarchist social games, London rushes, always excited, never solemn—preserve it from that. Either discovering ancient novelties or breaking its own self up with cheery unconsciousness, London society must always be gay. Gulled by intellectual quacks and art charlatans, or steeped in its own dissolvent sports, it is always amused. It is the most amused society in Europe. The terror of London lest it be not amused and be not amusing is an amusement in itself. London drawing-rooms, like some London pubs, ought to post up, "Keep smiling." Laugh before you speak, laugh before you think; when you have done both or either, laugh again. Welcome as if it were a great joke to welcome, greet the welcome as if it were an even greater joke to be welcomed, and part on a roar. Introduce boisterously, and be buoyant when introduced. Laugh through dinner. Always amuse and be amused. Remember that the only cardinal virtue is a sense of humour, and that, saving some lingering vestiges of English prudery, rien n'est sacré pour un sapeur. Paris dinners, where people all shout together, are solemn by comparison. About three Rabelaisian topics and two gay are allowed: outside that the number of things not to be made fun of is perhaps unlimited. It is, in fact, not proper to amuse people or to be amused by them; they suspect you of laughing at them, and irony, which is the only tone of conversation London society will stand, is the one Paris society is most suspicious of. The Parisian in London society comes to the conclusion that Paris is the last refuge of simplicity.

When he gets out of London society into thinking London, its variations surprise him instantly, for he is accustomed to so much more constancy at home. Here he is thrown from forgotten depths to unsuspected heights, and looks alternately blank at rawness and with fire at delicacy. He feels so often the teacher, but now and then he is confessed the learner. The variations of thinking London are much wider than those of thinking Paris. A calculation might prove the level the same in the two, but the former is generally the less intelligent, and the latter sometimes is much the less sensitive. London makes howlers Paris is incapable of; once in a blue moon London understands things Paris is incapable of understanding. The all-round intelligence of Paris is certainly higher, but rare flashes of London intelligence beat it.

The incomprehension of London is very wide. It lies equally over the ornaments of life and the matter of life. Beauty is its first victim. Moralising on art is as persistent under changed fashions as when Ruskin's sure eye and splendid word served his crooked judgment. It seems almost an impossibility for the English critic to assume that simple attitude, which every Frenchman has long since had to if he would keep his job, and look first of all at the thing he sees, not at what moral purpose he thinks he can see in it. He is constantly pleading, without understanding that he does it, for the artist who meant well and did less well. If the colour of a picture be ugly, who but a London critic will care if the painter had a beautiful idea to express? The Tate Gallery is half full of moral purposes without beauty. Why pretend that the colour and form of so many of Watts' pictures are beautiful? Because the painter had great ideas. Why deny that Holman Hunt's colour is usually ugly? Because he also meant something when he painted. Those are reasons only London

can be intellectually satisfied with. Other places would have the simplicity to say that if a painter can't put his beautiful ideas in beautiful paint he had better find some other way of expressing them. When the Parisian says this, London calls him insular. He is not indeed called so when he shrieks at the architectural monuments defacing poor, picturesque, homelike London. The Londoner grips him by the hand when they look at the Queen Victoria Memorial together and tremble. But in Paris at least when they put up a grotesque wedding-cake to Gambetta in the courtyard of the Louvre, whose well-bred and majestic stones have been shocked ever since, all Paris that cares for beauty cries out and goes on crying out. The little part of London that cares suffers dumbly and goes on suffering dumbly. The childlike perversities of Presidents of the Royal Academy are suffered in almost the same silence; official French art cannot help hearing roared every day what real French art thinks of it. But this may of course show less the incomprehension than the discretion of London.

The matter of life is treated by thinking London greatly by the method which the French call that of breaking open a door which nobody shut. Americas are very often discovered. That there is a breach between him who pays and him who is paid is found out. That woman and man are of different sexes is suddenly understood. In political questions and in social questions, which will be the only political questions, even thinking London cannot always conquer the rooted intellectual shyness of the average English mind; here, even bold English thought almost always stops short of the whole hog: thinking Paris always goes it. Thinking Paris, in its intellectual gymnastics, which are quite apart from the practice of its life, is therefore often not realist. But thinking London is stopped not

always by the practical sense; what is more serious is that it is often stopped from travelling to conclusions by sheer temperamental incapacity to venture thither. Paris rushes to them without a misgiving. Thinking Paris and thinking London arguing separately upon politics and social questions are remarkably different, considering both in the long run think much the same thing. The latter is nearly always delayed on the road by contingencies and tactical questions; Home Rule intrudes upon labour problems, party tactics upon principles. The former has long since jettisoned parties and their tactics, leaving them to "pure" politicians. Syndicalism is no new monster, but only English Trade Unionism logically thought by French Trade Unionists, who have not a tenth part of English Trade Unionists' material power, but have the power, or the violent instinct, to drive straight to conclusions. Political parties have been dropped on the way long since by thinking Paris. The new English campaign against the party system, a campaign which is partly a cloak to reaction and partly just a pleasing game, would be quite needless in France.

Even thinking London is really still wondering what man and woman are. It is always learning amazing things about the sexes, it is constantly discovering what an important thing sex is. Paris may have other discoveries to make, but not that. Woman pursuing man? Marvellous discovery. Our clean and pure English girls driven by the sexual instinct? Impossible. The instinct stronger possibly in that clean pure healthy English girl of to-day than in any other?! Even our intellectuals dislike the unpleasant paradox. We have exhausted art and philosophy and social problems, but we really are not yet sure whether sex is in the last analysis so very important after all. It certainly does crop up constantly in a way that surprises us, but when

we lift ourselves into the intellectual sphere, can we not leave it behind? You say it is always with us? You surprise us; you may be right, but you surprise us.

To thinking Paris this seems either strangely spiritual or strangely childish. That any thinking man should not posit sex as the first reality of all, before aught else he talked about, is incredible to the French mind. The perverted sexual fury of English "suffragettes" is to some extent accounted for by the strange gaps in the English intellectual grasp of realities. Are we the only intellectuals in the world not to recognise the first of these to be sex? One has only to listen to our great voice of the streets to know that the plain English people is near to the earth; it is thinking London that is furthest away and that is still wondering what man and woman are. 'Arry and 'Arriet are not; in that, thinking Paris is at one with 'Arry and 'Arriet.

The incomprehension of Paris is sometimes very deep, not, we hope (unless we despair either of mankind or of this world) because it looks the facts of life in the face. Some minds understand the sky and keep their roots in the earth. If there be any such collective minds, they are not those of Paris and of London. The mind of Paris sometimes fails beyond grace. It understands everything—except the one thing, not to understand which is damnation; it understands almost as far as one can understand, but not "to the ends of being." It is supremely intelligent, and now and then understands nothing. Thinking London very often misunderstands most things, but sometimes understands everything. Thinking Paris is entirely shut to mysticism, thinking London is not on the whole intelligent, but has flashes of divination. A William Blake never could and never will affect even thinking Paris. A very small part of London is affected by him. Paris will always stick at his chaotic technique and ask, how did this

man paint and draw, without going on to think what he thought. There is a truth in this attitude, often valuable, and priceless when all save the greatest are considered, but it is a fatal one towards some very few. Trust Paris judging Holman Hunt, but trust a tiny part of London judging Blake. Thinking Paris never will understand mysticism; one almost believes that thinking London never really will understand anything else.

Even below that level Paris sometimes fails before London. With all its inartistic sense, London sometimes does good things, builds for instance sometimes well, when left to itself and not taken in hand by the fatally grandiose ambitions of neo-Haussmanns, builds a charming cottage here and there or small town house, such as Paris has never been capable of turning out, and makes some of its new further suburbs pleasant with plain green gardens and quiet houses, while Paris builders are making Paris suburbs daily more hideous. With all its superficialness London sometimes produces subtle things, and some London humour remains incomprehensible to a Parisian who knows his London by heart: I do not think any Parisian humour remains incomprehensible to the Londoner who knows his Paris by heart. London has flashes of taste and bursts of refinement. London even has, in inspired moments and patches, a sincerity Paris to-day knows, if at all, more rarely and more scarcely. There are London cranks the Parisian must bow to, because he could not find the heart to be of them.

PARIS

IV

PARIS

PARIS certainly knows Paris better than London knows London. Yet the discovery of Paris by the Londoner might even teach the Parisian something about Paris. It is a discovery in three steps. The man discovering the bright husk of Paris is still very fresh, but Parisians should not sneer at him. The streets, the cafés, the life of the pavement, the women's get-up and make-up, the eager and sharp men, Montmartre, polished vice : it all means so much more to him than to Paris herself, who has so long taken it all for granted. Paris, rather dejected, rather severe, has long since ceased to be able to see herself as he sees her ; it might be good for Parisians to look at even Montmartre with the fresh, astonished, upset, shocked, excited new-comer's eyes. The solid Paris is a second and greater revelation to him. Every other reviewer of a former volume of mine recalled that the French have no word for " home " before acknowledging very kindly my effort to show they had the thing. " English people with naïve, romantic and honest faces quite different from the faces outside in the street " (of Paris) is a foolish sentence in an often real and sometimes fine English novel. That the French actually have homes, that French homes are much tighter castles than the English, that just as honest faces, if you look at them are to be seen at Montmartre as at Brixton, that Paris works harder than London, if it amuses itself (and especially amuses London) more, that average Parisian society is more respectable than average London society, that the Faubourg St. Germain

is a quiet village compared with Mayfair, and that a portion of Paris may some day be the last refuge of Londoners looking for simplicity, is a discovery which the Englishman always ends by making if he has the chance, though, until he has made it, the idea that he eventually will seems ludicrous to him.

The third discovery of Paris is that of an intelligent Paris or France, intellectual France being in great part Paris. The discovery of a solid Paris is amusing enough to the onlooker observing the discovery; the man, the Englishman in this case, discovering intelligent France is still more entertaining. He is an enthusiast at once and intolerant straight off. He will not hear of the France of Laurence Sterne, or of Stevenson's which is akin. The gentlest irony annoys him, and the slightest breath of condescension from masculine England to feminine France throws him into a fury. Delightful Englishman—for he is an Englishman still: no other people has brought forth men thus to be champions of other peoples. He is, of course, right in his way. Many English attitudes towards the French, and attitudes of thinking English minds, are exasperating, and the French intelligence when it once begins is astounding: that is our uninsular Englishman's discovery. One can honestly with him admire the French mind. It has thought the world out with a precision to which we wander-minds cannot hope to attain; it has summed up life with a deadly exactness of which we vague idealists are incapable; it has conceived reality with a force such as we dreamers have brought only to the conception of dreams. It has thought precisely and we have thought vaguely, it has defined and we have shadowed, it has settled and we have disturbed. It has made for its thought a garment which is the best fit of all languages; no style in the world says what it wants to say as well as that of

Renan, Maupassant, M. Anatole France. If the French mind is the clearest, the French tongue is the neatest in the world.

The Englishman's discovery of the French intelligence through the French tongue is naturally an interesting adventure. The French mind does so well so many things that the English does so ill. What you will never get a Frenchman to understand is that the Englishman on this discovery may not have stopped to think what things the French mind fails in while the English succeeds. The successes of the French intelligence catch the eye and convince at once, they do not woo and persuade, they are brilliant and not to be denied. The English mind is shyer at shining and making its point; the French is confident and rapid. In criticism it never stops short of a general theory; when it is creative it simplifies and outlines. Its work in philosophy and literature has perhaps almost solely been clearing the air, which other minds filled, often with vapours, and it has cleared triumphantly. It has boiled down metaphysical systems to a few epigrams, classified the universe in two or three bons mots, it has pruned, weeded out, trimmed the wild garden of men's thoughts. In the consistent desire to know everything but to know everything clearly (which to others means knowing wholly only parts of a few things) it has made a literary criticism which is probably the most philosophical, a dramatic poetry which is probably the most limited and narrow, a poetry which is probably the most pedestrian, a romance which is probably the most finished, an intelligent environment which is probably the most intelligent. In the limits within which the French mind has worked, its work has been perfect. It has been perfectly critical, it has created the pattern of well-reasoned drama and verse and the most judicious poems, the subtlest and best-thought-out novels, the

model of an intelligently self-sufficing world. It is this world which, sooner than anything else of intelligent France, attracts the English mind. French critics critics borrow from, French dramatists "French scholars" pretend to like, French poets are almost always misunderstood, French novelists cannot be known until French life is known; the intelligent French world, the intelligent Paris convinces at once the moment it is really known. The admiration of the Englishman coming really into it is touching. Probably the modern world offers no such examples of conquest and worship.

The French mind captures some English minds, intelligent Paris captures some intelligent Londoners, almost as conquered Greece captured the conquering Latins. In the first joy of surrender the English mind yields itself up completely. How often and in what various forms the observer sees this surrender! The French wrote of the "superiority of the Anglo-Saxons" —in football, public schools, and non-payment of M.P.'s. Some English go about to be champions of the French intelligence. This is sometimes in them the pride that apes humility—need we always after all be so confoundedly astonished because we find our neighbours no fools?—but it is often real meekness. The English discovery of the French intelligence is accomplished in several stages. In Paris it begins with "Parisianism." One cannot count the times the boulevard has been discovered since it ceased to exist. Abolish capital punishment? Let Messieurs the assassins begin. Journalism? it leads to everything provided you get out of it. How long will the delightful Englishman go on discovering the epigrams of Alphonse Karr and Villemessant and of dozens of other dead boulevardiers of the dead boulevards, Aurélien Scholl ("Christians are travellers bound for nowhere, but by

a beautiful road "), Arsène Houssaye, Henri Rochefort, who is still alive.

Parisianism, which every Parisian says is dead, killed by cosmopolitanism, but which on the contrary, unlike the boulevards, is still alive, must indeed still attract. It says as quick things as that "Londonism" which has never yet been given such a name, and some which last longer. Perhaps Londonism (to stick to the coined name) is sharper, funnier, wittier, but though it cuts neatly, it does not cut so deeply; it is comic and does not try to be more than comic; it plays with words well, but more with words than with ideas, or if it plays with ideas, takes standard ideas to shake them up into new puzzles, but does not find its humour at the back of its thoughts. Parisianism is not intrinsically witty or humorous; it must always be light and must always amuse, but it claims not only to amuse. In London, after all, if you amuse, you are not called upon to do more. Parisianism is required to go, not very deeply, but deeper. It is expected not to joke merely to be funny, and humour for the sake of humour; fancy for fancy's sake, are foreign to it and stared at. It must laugh, but the laugh must leave something behind, sometimes bitter, sometimes cruel, sometimes thoughtful. Fun is seldom poked at men without some sting; things are not to be laughed over without an afterthought. Parisianism delights in by-thrusts at essential things when the main business seems to be fun, and cares little for fun which keeps steadily to its own ground. The game of being serious suddenly and accidentally in the midst of banter is one at which Parisianism plays very well. Londonism can be wittier and can keep its dry smile for hours with amazing resourcefulness; it does not throw out of its fun the same abrupt feelers for reality. Parisianism has a particular talent for being serious lightly, dashing its jokes

with its philosophy of living, making fun out of its earnestness. An epigram, an immense laugh, a pun, and the fourth phrase has made a sudden spring at the ontological proof of the existence of God; spite tearing a poet's reputation breaks away to a new Ars Poetica; guying the latest drama of sentiment ends in each man telling how he loved best. The rapid excursions over, Parisianism is instantly light and mocking again. Its characteristic is to touch lightly upon essential things, to amuse itself with what it is most serious about. Londonism is amused with amusement, and loves humour for itself.

The second step in the discovery of intelligent Paris is from the boulevards to literary workshops, the third from writing Paris to thinking Paris. Both are interesting. The literary way of looking at life is nowhere as common as in Paris, life is nowhere as much thought about. It is not exactly the same world that thinks and writes; the entrance into both is agreeable. . . . "Et tout le reste est littérature," Verlaine said, but the literary mania well-developed has its value. It is not useless to look at things under the aspect of what you can write about them. Nothing worth reading may be written, but the things have been looked at that they might be read about, they have been seen at least objectively, perhaps with extra keenness. We have tried to stand away from life for a moment and for a moment to let it go by us; we may have seen nothing that any other might not have seen, and we may step into the race again with no more philosophy than we had before, still we shall have a little more than those who never stood. We look also more keenly at things in one way at least when we mean to make words out of them. They must be lopped and pruned, and they may lose, it is true, what most really matters in them, but the chopping and clearing, even wrong, is right discipline,

This discipline is learnt in the literary workshops of Paris. How to undersay things when so many oversay them is one thing learnt. It is a particularly good lesson for the Englishman fresh from complacent and ambling English novels. It is not surprising that the dry compression of Guy de Maupassant, the rich summing up of M. Anatole France should conquer him. The intelligent environment which produced them, or which produced the habits whence they came, must then sweep him in. It is a great novelty for many men to learn to think neatly, to weed out their minds, to jettison much good for the sake of the better, to sacrifice some truths for the clearer truth, to let the whole truth go by, that a part of the truth may be the better caught and fixed. Intelligent Paris writing, or thinking of writing and talking about it, is probably more accustomed than any other equal medium to train its thought to discretion. The exuberance and demonstrativeness of Paris, as they appear to some new-comers, are of course either mere inessential flourishes of character or else traits of the unthinking and uncultivated.

The educated Parisian who has at all lived and thought about living has formed for himself a surer, if often narrower, outlook upon the world than most men. His view of everyday things is definite and secure. He has built his own little organic scheme of the universe down to small details to suit himself, and he is prepared to fit whatever comes along into it. There is seldom anything which he cannot place. He is rarely to be surprised even by big things—or even by little things. He has learnt to look upon life as a work of art, a map, a table of contents, according to temperament. A philosophy master in Paris year after year urged his pupils to plan their lives in advance to the end, and on a blackboard he planned an ideal life divided by braces and sub-braces, drawn with dashing curves in

chalk: youth, prime of life, middle-age, old-age; youth—observation, self-control, training; prime of life—assimilation, execution, fatherhood; middle-age—experience, responsibility, meditation; old-age—retrospection, serenity, dissolution. The Philosophy Master has by now had the final brace filled up for him, I believe; I wonder sometimes how many of his pupils followed his lesson and mapped out their lives after his pattern on the blackboard, and which brace they have now reached. Perhaps among the boys who derided him, more learnt from him than thought they would. The amazing man who could at twenty have mapped his life on a blackboard as it worked out when he looks back upon it at sixty is probably less rare in France than elsewhere. This is less a quality than a fault in the French, whose chief sin is an excess of reason. But not all Frenchmen, or Parisians, chalk their lives out on a blackboard; there is perhaps no people among which a life is more often considered, consciously and unconsciously, as a work of art, which is a more organic thing than a table of contents. Here, also, there is reason at work, but often instinctively. A man, only half-consciously no doubt, gives form to his life as an artist to his handiwork, and in what he comes across passes by what does not suit him: he chooses among the new material which experience brings, retaining only what fits in with his design. He thus lives not accepting but discriminating, not passively taking what life has to give, but taking from life what life has to give to him in particular. Art is a choice; a life that chooses is, whatever it choose, in so far a work of art. The artist of life may be great; if mean, he is still to be called an artist. Though narrow, he is yet an artist, and perhaps it is likely that he will be narrower than those who take the whole of life as the daffodils take the winds of March with beauty.

In shaping his life he forms his aspect of other lives, and he often narrows both. Perhaps the thinking Parisian, or Frenchman, limits his reading of the world and his own writing in the world more than his peers elsewhere, but it should be understood that the limitation is less often the accident of ignorance than the result of a system. He may know less, not because he does not know, but because he does not want to know. The insularity of the Parisian is often misunderstood; he is shut up in his intelligent little world because he shuts himself up in it, not because he has had no glimpses of worlds without. There is a great difference between unconscious ignorance and a deliberately limited outlook. For many years past the Parisian has been slowly widening his outlook, but his principle as an artist in life remains the same: he opens his eyes to all sorts of strange and far things, "the soul of the English" and American activities, to South American Republics and the vicissitudes of the House of Lords, but this is because he chooses to see such things, not because they are forced upon his sight; at least he thinks so, and a man may know his own mind. He takes in these wonderful new things, but fits them in with what he had already, he takes them in only as they will fit in. He learns what will teach him to know himself better: everything is grist to his mill, but only grist, and only to his mill.

To attempt making an art of living goes with an artist's outlook upon the rest of life. The Parisian who is an artist in his own life has trained himself to look as an artist at the world. The literary aspect of the world, which it is not useless to consider, has become more familiar to him perhaps than to any other man. The literary judgment comes to him early, is almost in his blood; he is almost the only man in the street able without an effort to attain at once to artistic impartiality

in the judgment of ordinary things. In the smallest he can keep to impartial detachment; he can write journalism as an art, and read it as one; he can look at a murder, a swindle, a political crisis impartially, admire a beautiful crime, after Thomas de Quincey who was not exactly a man in the street, condemn a clumsy scandal, find in a police-court case the one thing that gives it an artistic interest. He can study his criminals, his great men, his politicians, as an artist studies faces to draw. Clemenceau the liberal ruling with a rod of iron, Briand the adapted anarchist stamping out strikes, he can consider, not even merely as artists themselves, but as works of art turned out by the handicraft of a finely imaginative nature. Gambetta he can look upon and remember as a symbol detached from the man, the idiot General Boulanger could be to him a rousing sign for a moment, a moment which did not show the literary view of life to its best advantage. He can watch a big murder trial as he would a play with good situations, and watch the murderer guillotined without moral indignation, without virtuous relish, without much horror of the senses, and mainly with an extraordinary readiness to receive vivid, but impersonal impressions; the sensitive who faint, may find after all that they received a less deep and lasting impression than he.

Criticism, to which the ordinary English mind attains only by a superhuman effort, thus comes to him almost naturally. The Parisian in the street is an artistic critic. He has overcome the great difficulty of the English mind, which is to look at a picture without asking what it is about, to consider a criminal and remember he is a man, to study a politician apart from his politics, to think of a thing without putting a moral purpose into it. The whole secret of the power of Parisian literary workshops is the existence of this easy and

generally artistic impartiality. If the French literary artists, M. Anatole France, Maupassant, exist, it is because they are directly, easily and generally understood. It would be possible nowhere else for Bel ami to be so well and so generally understood. To come into an environment where Bel ami, a more ruthless picture than any other of a cruel hideousness which exists as ruthlessly elsewhere but unpictured, can, not by a few but by many, be read without moral indignation and only with an artist's admiration for the picture itself, is the greatest discovery of intelligent Paris.

The dangers of discovering intelligent Paris are perhaps not generally understood, for they are not generally withstood, but claim easy victims. Parisianism works havoc among raw English minds. We soon find them out-Parisianing Parisians. Oh, the bright manner, the light banter, the gay glimpses at serious things, the lightning judgments; alas! the Gallic gaiety, the hybrid chatter, the "mon cher's," the "épatant's," the "et voilà's," showered over English talk to make it "vivid"; spare us the verbless sentences starting off with an adjective written to give style "vivacity"; save us chiefly from the Parisian way with women, the flattery that goes just too far, the allusiveness that just overshoots the mark, the paying court that just pays too much, that just tips too high. In this company it is the real Parisian that becomes phlegmatic, bluff and downright. Is this my image? he asks, and sinks gasping into his shell. For he actually has a shell, though he is a Parisian.

The French literary mind makes other undiscerning disciples. The human steadiness behind it is not perceived, and it is taken for more than it is meant to be. It is promoted to a philosophy and its excesses, which itself in its sober temper rejects, are called its principles. That the literary mania is fatal, not to morals, but to

literature, is not understood: the artist's egoism kills, not society, but art. The English discoverer of the French literary spirit does his find to death, and he drives us back to French fleshly sense for the cure of French literaturitis. Taking up the literary outlook he gives another example of English absoluteness. He can't be held back, he must make words out of the world, he has learnt the impartiality of French criticism, the world is a thing to look at from afar, a toy to play with in words, the world is copy, " la littérature seule existe." But Verlaine answers Mallarmé with " que ton vers soit la bonne aventure " . . . and this is above mere literature. The best French minds have given us the antidote to French literaturitis, and French literaturitis is the most intelligent in the world. Let us drink the excellent poison, but the cure too. We have much to learn from the French literary spirit, for no other literature has bred one as complete: that learnt, let us remember the higher spirit, and that perhaps English poetry more than any other has reached.

At its highest the French mind has dangers. To say the French mind is to give an example of the danger to which it may lead us. Is there a French mind ? The French mind, which cannot think two thoughts without a generalisation in the third place, answers " Of course." Unless we hesitate when we say the French mind, and unless we admit that we may be sacrificing the particular to the general, and trampling on the individual, we shall be precisely committing the darling sin of the French mind which generalises against every odds. We may say there is a French mind, making reservations; the French mind makes none proclaiming itself. The English faculty of dissociation is foreign to it. The English mind (granted there be an English mind) can carry several independent thoughts for a lifetime and never let them touch one another. It can hold in one cup beauty, virtue,

sin, strength, the realities and the dreams of life, and never mix them. This may be a peculiarly English faculty, it is perhaps never French. The French mind seems hounded by reason, driven to unity. In the highest thought of men it has co-ordinated, compared and deduced, as in the common world it has made and applied methods of living. It has indeed supplied the standard of reason, taught men how to think most safely and how to live most surely; it is the world's regulator. Let us not be over-regulated by it. We, who are badly balanced, need some such pendulum; we must admire its steady beat, and we should often stop patiently to time ourselves upon it. The French mind can teach us clear and weighty reason. But do not let us forget our own unreason. We must not, as some of us do, worship the neat mapping out of the world; it is a wonderful map, but it is not all the world. The admirably clear philosophy is not one that dreams of all things 'twixt Heaven and earth. The French mind has done one of the most useful tasks for mankind, clearing the air; let us admire it at work and stand amazed before the directest and surest mind in mankind. But ours is perhaps another task, filling the air.

The Englishman has discovered intelligent Paris, Parisianism, writing Paris, thinking Paris: lovable Englishman! He loves Parisianism better than his own humour, writes Gallicisms and thinks neat French thoughts. He leaves the English world of laughter and laughs only with a meaning behind his laugh, and he loses the sense of nonsense. His language at its worst paraphrases the "Ballad of Bouillabaisse," at its best is both pruned and abstract, both simplified and burthened. He has learnt to think more clearly and more stiffly, with more intelligence and less feeling, to see more and desire less.

He should be a various object-lesson to Parisians.

He discovered the gaiety of Paris, and Parisians do not always know that Paris is gay. He next discovered the solid Paris, and Parisians rarely understand that the solid Paris is not seen at first sight. At last he discovered thinking Paris, and was to be held up as an awful example to Parisians. They could see in him how intellectual neatness may narrow the mind, how the too nice choice of life may sterilise life, how unreasonable a view of the universe an excess of reason can give. He learnt from them how to trim his thought, plan his life and define his faith. He might have taught them guesswork, wandering, and dreams.

POLITICS

V

POLITICS

THE characteristic of English public affairs in the last thirty years has been a want of collective political imagination, while individual minds and groups of minds have sometimes been brilliantly imaginative. When the Grand Old Liberal, whose mind and character were typical of all the best conservatism in the English spirit, made what seemed to the country a wild flight of political Quixotism, and brought in his Home Rule Bill, no one in the least open to impressions could fail to be caught by the sheer beauty of the narrow, cast-iron, generous old man's sudden beat of his wings. An Orangeman with a spark of imagination must have admired, if hated, him. Those who were boys at the time still remember being stirred, though they did not much understand, and " Mr. Gladstone bringing in his Home Rule Bill in the House " are words that to them still have a sound of something great. The beauty of the thing escaped the country. A public with imagination would have felt it with sudden warmth. Hail or hate the Grand Old Man's policy, but love the beauty of his flight, not take up or kick away the " platform " without a heart-beat. The French would have felt the emotion of the moment in a flash. It is exceedingly likely that the French never would have dreamt of even allowing Home Rule to be talked about, and would have stamped out Irish Nationalism long ago. But, in the same circumstances, they would have instantly felt the G.O.M.'s move to be sudden great drama; it would have sent a spark through the nation, and fired the national imagination.

When Imperialism was "invented," it did not genuinely fire public imagination in the British Empire. The puffing and blowing of journalists and others in the effort to kindle their own imaginations was one of the most lamentable sights of the modern writing world. No really good catch-words were thought of, no really good rhetoric written. To be told to "think Imperially," to be preached at about abstract "efficiency," and nothing whatever to be efficient for, was enough to put men of taste off from thinking about the empire at all. It has been argued that this proved Imperialism hollow, and that the reason why the greatest writers wrote badly when they wrote "Imperially" was that the subject itself was a bad one. The argument cannot stand for a moment. There has never been a greater political sham than the first French empire, but it kindled the public imagination to a blaze. Think what the Napoleonic spirit would have done with British Imperialism, both in the leaders and in the led. Think of the gorgeous rhetoric of the Napoleonic proclamations that might have been issued from Downing Street to the four corners of the empire in the four corners of the earth. And think how the British people, had it had the same temper as the French people under Napoleon, would have responded. Napoleonic era literature was miserable, but the public imagination was wonderfully rich. The imagination of British Imperialists, leaders and led, preachers and preached at, was beggarly. Tariff Reform coming out of Imperialism, was even more dully advertised. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain had some imagination of his own; he never succeeded in awakening it in others.

But by far the two most significant things within the British empire during the past quarter of a century have, of course, been the General Election of 1906 and the union of South Africa. Both show characteristics of

the English public temperament to an extraordinary degree in different ways; both afford excellent terms of comparison with the French public temperament. The union of South Africa proved the want of public imagination throughout an empire as nothing ever did before in history. Those who saw all that it meant looked on with amazement. Did the English public never understand what it meant? Have the English no public imagination whatever? Never was a great thing done and its greatness so dully slurred over. Here was a chance for patriotic pride—never a better. Who took it? What English politician bragged about this great thing and thanked God he was an Englishman because of it? Who even talked about it, even pretended not to be bored by it? What man in the street thumped his chest and said he had now at least something to be proud of his country for? The only things we do well we may do in a shame-faced, hole-and-corner way, and we might to a certain extent be proud of not boasting. The unlucky part is that we do boast about the things we have done more or less badly. We contrived to boast about the Boer War, we sometimes boast about our rule in India, and not a man to brag about the best thing we have done for years. We do not seem to understand that no other people would have done the same thing, whereas probably half a dozen might have managed the Boer War better, and one or two might easily rule India as well as we. What we have done in South Africa no other people would have been idealist enough to think of doing. Any who had done it would chant for ever after in splendid pride about it. We immediately began talking about something else. Yet, compared with it, what interest was there in muddly education measures, in tariffs, in land values, in bungs, and in the House of Lords? Imperialists ignoring it as much as possible were quite in order

by the rule of party tactics : but it was the one feather the Liberals had to put in their caps, and they never wore it. I do not think they were held back by scruples, but rather by unintelligence. They never saw the real beauty of the thing they had in great part done themselves. Such want of imagination has been praised ; but it is not true that doing things well unconsciously is a quality, or even that it is not a fault. If you don't understand what you are doing, not only you lose most of the credit for doing it well, but the chance is even that you will do it ill just as instinctively next time. Had the French people made the union of South Africa (it never would have dreamt of making it after the Boer War), it would have understood what it was doing and thought, discussed and told us all about it. The value of the thing would be known completely and accurately prized ; we should go to French reasonings to obtain (allowing for the national patriotic bias) the true and full philosophy of what the French themselves had done. This would perhaps have been a less modest manner than ours, but intelligent conceit is better than unintelligent modesty.

The state of the English public mind shown by the General Election of 1906 was characteristically English. The " discovery " by the middle-classes of the score or so of various and conflicting ways of social thought pleasantly grouped under the name of Socialism, was one of the most curious events in modern social history. " Socialism " had been talked about for years, and the business classes had never heard of it. Highgate had never heard of Hyde Park ; more than that, Russell Square had had no rumours from Upper Woburn Place. The " Socialist " was a lunatic from foreign parts, or an Englishman with a red tie gone wrong under foreign influences. The election returned a Labour Party over forty strong : I shall not forget the exploding of the

bomb-shell among the solid classes of the English people.

When the childlike solid British middle-classes discovered socialism in 1906 they gave one an excellent peg to hang a comparison of the English and French political temperaments upon. This discovery was only a detail, but it set one thinking. The French bourgeoisie, by long talking of itself into familiarity with the words of socialism, had learned to know it for a tame monster, and moderate conservatives had learned to call themselves Socialist-Radicals. On the other side there never had been any Hyde Park Sundays in France, and what upstart thinking and speaking had been going on had never been ignored by the classes in possession. Socialism was discovered by those who have, sooner than by those who have not: hence the strength of the French Parliamentary Socialist Party and the weakness of French trade unions. There could thus be observed at once the greater political adaptability of the French and the greater political stolidity of the English; the intelligence of the French and the dullness of the English pillars of society; the solidity of French life compared with French politics, the comparative want of solidity in English life. The solid English middle-classes had not enough of the French firm faith in life not to be honestly scared by the bogey of socialism, at the same time that the bogey failed to make as much impression on the English as on the French political world.

The particular contrast between the relatively shifty and substantial politics of France and England and the relative shakiness and solidity of English and French life suggests broader likenesses and differences between the two political temperaments. The two great points of political kinship between the two peoples is their common political genius and their common love of

liberty; both must put the two at the head of modern nations. No two others, except perhaps the small and wonderful Swiss patchwork, have freedom as much in the blood, or the same natural bent for social building. This kinship is perhaps more talked about in international speeches than really thought about. It takes the Frenchman and the Englishman some time, travelling, and reflection to understand the one how free, in spite of her rigid forms, and constructive, in spite of her muddling, England is, and the other that in spite of her accepted bureaucracy the "liberty" written in the Republican motto of France is a real thing, and that although she talks so much about social buildings she does build. The superficial observer of politics in England sees discipline, in France hears words; he next observes English muddle and French autocracy. All these impressions reflect parts of the truth. Seen in proper perspective, neither English discipline, nor English rule of thumb; neither French political changeableness, nor French stiff-necked officialism; neither the Lord Mayor's Sword-Bearer, the Cap of Maintenance, Rouge Dragon and Portcullis Pursuivant, nor the Territorials, Education Bills, Licensing Laws; neither house-of-card Cabinets, self-contradictory Parliamentary parties, Anarchist Royalists, conservative socialists, nor despotic prefects, martinet tax-collectors, Imperialist centralisation, absolutist disestablishment, can prevent England and France from being the two most free and constructive nations in the world.

English freedom and French freedom are the types of modern political liberties; the two peoples have different ways of being free. The peculiar talent of the English is to combine individualism and discipline; it is one the French have not. The Englishman, stubbornly jealous of his own rights and bias, is capable of working well with others to a common end, if he see

the end clearly and judge it worth his while and unattainable by himself alone. No man is more pig-headedly individualistic, none can pull better together with others when it suits him; none is more self-centred in his own little life, yet none has made a like success of club-life. He will go his own gait like a bull in a china shop if he chooses; if he chooses to tramp in company he will fall in with the step. When he has made up his mind the game is worth playing he keeps to the rules, in cricket, on committees, and in party politics; but he will obey rules only of his own free will, he must first of all choose what rules he will obey, then he will obey them. Of course it is usually not his free will, it is his blood, his upbringing, and his surroundings that choose for him, but he thinks himself a free agent and obeys therefore without a qualm.

This social and political discipline in individualism is quite un-French. The French mind has a difficulty in being free between blinkers; if it wants to see, it cannot bring itself to put them on, and when it puts them on, it shuts its eyes altogether. It has not the English talent for accepting rules and being lawless within those rules. If it is a free mind it has no sooner given itself rules than it questions them; English discipline consists in believing that bad rules are better than none, and English independence can keep upright within fixed lines, well or ill-drawn, once accepted. The French mind, if it thinks at all, thinks first about the fixed lines and must move them; it cannot keep itself from altering the rules during the game. Why play by the rule when it is a stupid rule? Because it is the rule, never is the French answer. Hence, the passion for reform in the forms of government. We are in the habit of laughing at the French because they are always pasting new labels on old goods; they might retort, that we carefully keep cracked gallipots to put

new jam into when we happen to have made new jam. They change the names of things because they rightly feel that a new thing under an old name is not really new; the substance of some things cannot change, a new name then is some approach to a new form. It may and it does happen that the French do not succeed in changing more than a name because the inertia of the thing is too strong for them. In those cases we do not think of even changing the name. The French never think of beginning with the thing and letting the name change itself. When they reform only forms, their failure is due, not to half-heartedness, but on the contrary to absoluteness: they must have the whole change at once, and rush at once to the finished form of the new thing, including new words, new names, new symbols. They change forms first because they want, not because they don't want, essential changes. The fixed forms to which the English mind clings are the rules which it sets itself for the game and within, but only within, which it plays freely. If the French mind give itself such rules it cannot play freely. When it does give itself rules it is the most rigidly regulated mind in the world. French political conservatism is the narrowest of the modern world, and French social conservatism the most rigorous; what the French royalist, imperialist (the remnant left of it), clericalist and nationalist parties aim at is by main force to set up a complete despotism, and really conservative French families would be scared by the Bohemianism of the British middle-classes.

Because the French mind does not take kindly to discipline in freedom it is not good at co-operation. We are, individualists though we be. The French do not pull well together, but pull at sixes and sevens if there is any pull in them at all. A common practical purpose will marshal us into an orderly political army,

they will not fall to for so little. Such a purpose must always be only a makeshift, and some among them will pick holes in it at once. The give and take of political and social co-operation is repugnant to them. Their purpose, if for its sake they are to sink differences and club together, must be something further away—a cause, a hero. A high cause satisfies longings and swamps independent motives. A man with the heroic quality is worth working shoulder to shoulder for, and the sheer heroic in him becomes by itself the high cause. We are little given to hero-worship. When our heroes are dead we are sentimental over them; we care more for what they do than for the men themselves. The French can be great hero-worshippers, as they can also be ferocious iconoclasts, which comes much to the same thing. It is in this sense that they are idealists, they who are constantly calling themselves so, though in every other the strongest realists in the world. About us the most realistic thing probably is, on the contrary, our politics, and in the political world a mark of our realism is our small zeal for hero-worship. In this way our lack of political imagination has sometimes served, instead of harming, us: we have had no Napoleon, but we have had no General Boulanger either. "Boulangism" will remain as the perfect example of the worst trap political enthusiasm can lay for the French. It never could have caught us; on the other hand, even to fall into a trap requires imagination. It will always be a problem whether it is worse for a people to have worshipped a sham hero than to have worshipped no hero at all.

The most obvious difference between the French and English political temperaments is between the theorism of the former and the opportunism of the latter, between French general ideas and English rule-of-thumb. The strongest link between the two is that both have

built more effectually and more richly than any other modern political minds, the former practically, in spite of its theorism, the latter harmoniously, in spite of its shortsightedness. Another link is the self-contradictoriness of both political spirits. Perhaps, because we are the two most intelligent political nations, we are the two most inconsistent. The persistency of the firm French earth beneath wild political overgrowths has been shown before; it is almost as remarkable to see the solid English soil suddenly shifting here and there beneath the carefully laid out garden of English politics. Flights of political fancy leave French life solider than before; in the midst of the imperturbably steady game of English politics the English public mind, which seemed to have no imagination, is abruptly carried away by impulses and scares. Perhaps the fact is that its faith in life is not as firm as it looked. Our steady political game is what keeps us going steadily; when we have only our faith in life to fall back upon we are shaky. The French faith in life is the solidest thing the French have, and they are never on firmer ground than when they have only that to fall back upon. Yet we also do believe in life; perhaps, the truth then is that the French have reasoned out a faith in life, and we have not. When that faith is all the support left us we find only an instinct to stand on; the French find an instinct upon which they have already built a philosophy. Faith in life is a stronger mainstay for the French than for us, because they have thought more about life than we, who have mostly felt about it.

The history of the Third Republic continuously shows the variations of French politics and the steadfastness of French life. No other country has come out of such crises so unscathed. "Boulangism" drew to itself every politician venturesomely on the make and many green hero-worshippers; it came nearer than

most people remember now to setting up a plunder rule by a ready gang: the poor hero's dismay, a quick trick of political high-handedness, and Boulangism was killed, the Third Republic coming out of it stronger. The Dreyfus case tore the nation in two: one side tried the Boulangist game again (it was the same gang with a bigger and greener backing) and as nearly succeeded; the other side just for the sake of the cause (was there ever a cause that plucked up so many properly growing roots?) was ready to call for the great social upheaval. The case was settled, the one side was beaten, once more, the other dropped the social revolution like a hot coal: the State had been strengthened by the defeat of the party led by adventurers, and had not been weakened by the rashness with which the substantial party of liberty had let itself in for a good deal more social liberty than it had bargained for. The "bloc" rose out of the Dreyfus case to power. The Church Party had reached its highest point of power under the third Republic at the beginning of the Dreyfus case. The bloc smashed the Church Party for the time being, started the sharpest change any great State has known in the last thirty years, and in less than a tenth of the time England spent talking about Irish Home Rule, French Disestablishment became a finished, accepted, almost conservative fact. Simultaneously, hand labour was grumbling more loudly at its lot, the Parliamentary Socialist Party formed, Trade-Unions at last became legal, the Parliamentary Socialist Party came to effectual, almost official power with the bloc, labour yet more loudly grumbled, the C. G. T. (General Labour Federation) succeeded in becoming the mouthpiece for its gruffest growls, the Socialist Party "unified" itself away from "bourgeois" Power, and failed to unify itself into Trade-Unionism's good graces, and the great social crash was a dead certainty two or three times a year.

Boulangism, militant clericalism and its consequence political anti-clericalism, anti-Dreyfusist patriotism on the make, "bourgeois" Dreyfusism turning revolutionist for the sake of Dreyfus, the blood and thunder of the C. G. T., reactionism crying wolf every five minutes: that is the froth on the top. The country, after the discreet stroke of despotism that killed Boulangism, returning not only to quietness, but also to no less liberty; the anti-Dreyfusists quashed, the Dreyfusists sobered; the Church, firmly and peacefully disestablished by the State, as solidly and quietly re-established in the wealthy classes; the Socialist Party producing weighty statesmen, soon known as Conservatives: these are the still waters beneath, which the froth pretends not to see, and by its own pretence proves to exist, labour pointing proudly to its better organisation as to the sign of its fierce anarchism, and reaction shouting that the country has gone to the dogs because it persists in living quietly under the Republic. It is the French faith in life that has always kept France firm. It can be torn no more from French anarchists than from French bourgeois, no more from French poets than from the pillars of French society. Whatever he may scheme or wreck or dream, the Frenchman remembers always the exceedingly true thing that the first of all human causes is living. Much in the conduct of our affairs might be explained by our forgetting to posit life as the fact to start from.

The contemporary history of the political State relations between England and France has been a history of impulses on one side, and of deliberation on the other. The chief reason why the French have been much more careful in their doings with us than we in ours with them is that they are ill-informed on foreign affairs, and leave them to specialists. Even politicians are not sure enough of themselves in the subject to

play with it. Thus, and by the traditional practice of the Quai d'Orsay, much more oracular and Sibylline than the English Foreign Office, foreign affairs are put in a pigeon-hole of their own, away from the litter of other political affairs which politicians toss up and bang about pleasantly, as the delicious Under Secretary of State for Fine Arts in the "Bois sacré" banged about the dossiers on his table whenever any one called, to show how busy he was. In foreign policy French political fancy is shy of indulging itself, and French solidity accordingly rules. Almost the contrary happens with us. We cannot apply the set rules of our own deliberate political game to the international sport of foreign affairs; our own congenital method failing us, we are alternately blind or wild-eyed. In politics the French are more level-headed abroad than at home, and we are the opposite, because abroad the flourishes of French character cease and its substantial nature prevails, and because abroad our political conventions lapse and our character has to throw itself upon the mercy of unthought-out impulses. We also have specialists in foreign affairs, but we interfere more with them than the French with theirs; and our intervention is always emotional, whereas there is little real emotion in our home politics. French political excitability, on the contrary, is almost wholly confined to home politics.

French public opinion has rarely gushed or ranted over foreign affairs since the Third Republic, and even when it did lose its head, it lost it consistently. The excitements stirred up among us in the corresponding period by foreign policy questions have been generally incoherent and contradictory. In the Franco-Russian honeymoon the bride certainly did gush, and would have been scolded by those French mothers who hold it improper in a wife to be in love with her husband "just as if she were his mistress"; but in spite of

the one-sided spooning, it really was a perfect " marriage of reason." The women who held their babies up to be kissed by Admiral Avellan's sailors in the streets of Paris were acting most politically. The only possible European policy at that time for the Republic was that of the Franco-Russian Alliance. The French poured their money out, but the alliance was worth, if not quite such a price, at least a big one. From the Franco-Russian Alliance to the Entente Cordiale, our policy towards Russia was as changeable as an April day—northerly gales and beaming sunshine alternating every five minutes. How can Europe know where she is with us ? The remarkable thing is that not a few, but all of us, change. Anti-Tsarist tories, pro-Tsarist liberals, the Conservative more revolutionist for Russia than the Radical English press, and the Conservative English journalist's articles filed by Russian revolutionists as the truest record of the revolt of the Russian people ; a year or two later English Conservatives all smiles for the Russian autocracy, as if nothing had happened, and suppressing all reports of Russian revolutionism ; a few months after that English Liberals all smiles for the enlightened freedom of the Prussian Government, and English Conservatives ready, if pressed, to call the Russian Empire freer than the German. What weathercocks we are ! Every time public opinion apparently takes every change to be final, and forgets all about its excitement of the year or the week before. We are all against the Turk, then all against the Russian, all for the German and against the French, then all for the Frenchman and against the German, all for the Jap, then all for the Russian, with a six months' interlude of being all against the Austrian. What new moods the Turk's downfall will eventually move us to is a pretty problem in national psychology for the future. In the same time, French

foreign policy hardly changed at all; it changed only once, and then turned slowly round with careful deliberation. France was naturally not best pleased when Russia plunged into the fatal Far-East Imperialist policy and the war with Japan, but she stuck to the alliance. She could not help herself, it is true, but her Government was always careful not to spoil its faithfulness by any betrayal of ill-grace. Towards Germany she has remained the same since the war of 1870, never altogether forgetting, never altogether burying the hatchet. During her coolness with England her Government, under Jules Ferry, had shadowy visions of a German entente some day, but the country would never have accepted it then, and would still less accept it now. The booting out of M. Delcassé has been the only case of real scare in France under the Third Republic, compared with which the Schnaebele incident was insignificant. Nobody pretends it was not a bad case of funk; but less than three-and-a-half years later France retrieved herself by speaking to the German Empire as no other Power has spoken to it since its foundation. Her doing so was no mere accidental burst of pluck; she had carefully wrought herself in those years to the pitch of being able to do so. The understanding with Italy was no sudden move of M. Delcassé, and it has not changed since it was formed. With Austria the French Republic has always been on politely friendly terms, having always had a thought —not far wrong, perhaps—at the back of her head that Sadowa and Sedan made a link that might some day be useful, and during the Bosnia-Herzegovina annexation crisis the Quai d'Orsay, not caring tuppence about the Berlin Treaty, was all the time making discreet signs to the Ball-Platz not to mind our excitement—"They don't mean anything. Just humour them. They're a good sort. It will all blow over"—while we

were dancing in eager zest in our emotion over the Southern Slavs, until we found we danced all alone. As for relations with us, it is France throughout who has kept a cool head, and we who have ranted or gushed. Who in England now remembers the wild Fashoda fuss ? We certainly did not present the spectacle of an even-tempered nation ; the French measured the risk carefully, found it not worth running, and gave in. It is difficult now to conceive that we were ready for so insane an act as war with France over Fashoda. A few years later we were throwing ourselves at the head of France. I have once or twice told the story of King Edward's amazing move, when he went to Paris with the entente cordiale in his pocket, which the French had never dreamt of asking him to bring, and which they looked all over before taking it. Everything French suddenly became perfect in England. During the Boer War and the Paris Exhibition of 1900, which we well-nigh boycotted, we had talked of frog-eaters and French vices. The French spent two years or so wondering whether they would take our proffered hand, after having called us all the names they could think of during the Boer War. No matter, we went on pretending they were wringing it warmly all the time, and when they did at last honestly take it, we had exhausted all our protestations of friendship. When we remember Fashoda and the beginning of the entente cordiale, can we really still call the French mercurial and ourselves steady-going ?

Yet we still often do when we compare ourselves with them. We do not call ourselves steady when we look only at our own Foreign Office. On the other hand, belief in the lynx-eyed Machiavellism of our Foreign Office is a favourite French superstition. This is of a piece with the two nations' misunderstandings of each other in political and other matters. We do not make

the exactly converse mistake, and call the French flighty in their foreign policy; but we do call them mercurial in their home affairs. In observing our home affairs, the French ingenuously marvel at our solidity, look with awe at the House of Lords, and cry out in friendly pain when we touch that bulwark of blood, race and culture, spoilt by no money or unseasoned shoddiness. We marvel with the same simplicity at French upheavals, strikes, plots, "open rebellion," the "onrush of revolutionism," and every time fear that this time France really is going to the dogs.

Our political solidity and want of imagination are real; French political imaginativeness and variability are real; but, while the more obvious, both are the less interesting characteristics of the two peoples. If they understood each other better, what would interest us most in French politics, as in French life, would be to observe the solidity beneath the mobility; and what would interest the French most in our politics, as in our life, would be to watch the jumps we make in the midst of our steadiness.

POLITICIANS

VI

POLITICIANS

I. Types

THE greatest and commonest fallacy committed in parallels between English and French politicians is the comparison drawn between the amateurism of the former and the professionalism of the latter. It would be truer to reverse the terms of the comparison. The professionals are the English politicians, the French are the amateurs. Not only are the former professionals, but the profession among them is hereditary. Among the latter the political gift or taint is very seldom handed down, and not more than two or three political families are known to keep in the same line of business from father to son. Payment of members is not a chief point. Members may be paid £400 or £600 a year to sit in Parliament, but unpaid members were paid much more long before they began to sit. What matters more is the existence of a political caste, as in England and not in France. A certain type of Englishman for two centuries has thought of Parliament as his natural place by the time he was twenty-five or so; the French have not this equivalent. He considers Parliament so much to be his own province that he naïvely calls intruders, upstarts and men from nowhere the increasing number of his rivals who are outside his caste because their fathers did not sit in the House before them. The only French counterpart of the English political caste might be found in the French hereditary Government clerk class. "Keepers of mortgages" from father to son are conceivable,

and do exist through generations, and it is not only plausible that the Deputy sub-Chief of a Department in the office of Stamps, Registration and Domains should, but very likely that he will, bring his boy up to be Deputy sub-Chief at his age. The differences are that the Government clerk caste is not paid enough to live upon without the help of its wives' dowers, whereas the political caste can afford not to be paid at all, and that the French "Administration" is not a political caste, but hates, though fearing, politicians, and has in the blood a dislike of the public spirit and of the public voice, however expressed.

The French politician belongs to no caste; he jumps into politics from anywhere. The type of public man in which we have gloried for centuries is therefore not to be found across the channel, nor perhaps anywhere but in Great Britain. He is solely an English or Scotch type. We are, of course, exceedingly proud of him, and we need not indeed be ashamed of him. British public spirit is one of the familiar English or Scotch gods among which we have all been brought up. Going abroad we sometimes like it even better than we did at home, and the typical man of the British political caste which claims no other raison d'être does not become unsympathetic seen from afar. He rather gains in our affection and becomes almost lovable; but he does not gain in impressiveness. We love him, but we look up to him less; we look at him affectionately, with a wild surmise. He almost amazes seen from abroad. He looks like something inhuman, something unearthly, he is not, in so far as he is a type, like the men of other nations. In himself he is of course an amiable gentleman; the caste he stands for is a growth hanging by only a slender twig to mankind. As its representative he is not a man, but a frame of mind transmitted by heredity. He does not approach human

things humanly, when acting representatively, but as a formula going out to meet facts. A very excellent formula he often is and one that has often served, and still serves usefully; not a formula deduced from a theory like the neat words, not the hot passion, of the French Revolution, but one picked up dimly through generations from life, one therefore that can be applied to some kinds of that life from whose past it was gathered. He is indeed no theory, British public spirit is "nothing if not practical," but the practice is very strange. The practician does not look at political life as if it were real life. The hallowed British public habit of "muddling through" does not come from political realism; the deed is realist because it has to be, the thought was a dream. The British politician lives in a dream, or in the midst of a game.

The most remarkable spectacle presented by political England to other countries is the steady going on of the game, be human things what they will. If they fit in with the game the accident is a lucky one; if they don't, so much the worse for humanity, not for the game, and the game goes on interestingly. This is not the same thing as French political theorism; its causes are almost contrary, it sometimes leads to much the same consequences. The English political game started from some actual aspects of English life, never from any thinking about life, even English life; French political theorism grew solely from schemes of life which enjoyed ignoring life for the purpose of reasoning about it. When the former happens to suit the human things it plays with, it suits them well, perhaps even better than the latter ever can, and a political theorist who theorises wrong is highly unsafe; but when the political game is out of touch with reality it is an emptier performance than wrong political theorism. Because the political game is played in Great Britain by the same

caste from father to son (and we love the caste because it does play the game) we can call the British politician the professional politician of Europe.

The French is the amateur because whether his politics be a game or a business he dribbles or pitchforks himself into it. The English political caste, dabbling in politics in the intervals of golf, is the professional political caste with professional traditions, professional etiquette, professional esprit de corps and bent of mind and a professional equation. The French political world has no such unity and coherency. Its variety and confusion are proofs of its amateurism. The bulk of English political men belong to the political caste, even Fourth Parties and "caves" belonged to it, and the genuine irregular sharpshooter on either side is rare. The French political caste is a very small one, with a precarious existence and almost no heredity: one can remember few instances in contemporary times of political influence handed down from father to son. The French political world is renewed from day to day; it is the "administrative" world that remains imperturbably the same through crises and revolutions. The French politician, of later years at least, has sprung up like jack-in-the-box and gone down like a pricked bladder. He jumped up from anywhere: he may be a "gentleman," a barber, a barman, an engine-driver, a millionaire, a mine-owner, a Doctor of Medicine, a Doctor of Philosophy, a Doctor of Law. He leapt into the political world without any family traditions for a spring board. He came into it often by accident, usually because in some small but widening circle he was the man with the gift of the gab and the masterful manner. He comes new to the job; it brings him in, barring postages, drinks to constituents and a flat in town, £600 a year, but at least it finds him fresh. He does not step wearily into a game which his father played

conscientiously before him. He is paid, he is raw and he doesn't know the rules, but he is fresh.

The variety, that is to say, the vitality, of the French political world is its quality; the quality of the English political world is its saneness. At its worst the former is irresponsible; the latter at its worst is dead. At their best, the one is full of ideas and the other has a steady nerve. Both are in opposition to the life around them, but the opposition is almost exactly reversed in the two cases. French political life is much flightier than French life; English life has luckily much more ideas than English political life. In England the political caste is the brake upon the wheel, in France the French people is the brake. I am not prepared to advance that the House of Commons daily holds the British people back from making revolutions, or to deny that the French people has made revolutions. But it is, I think, clear that the British people is comparatively more impressionable than its politicians, and the French people comparatively more level-headed than its politicians, and clearer still that more imagination is to be found in the English people than in English politicians, and a firmer grasp of the facts of life among the French people than among French politicians.

There is one foremost imposing, satisfying, beautiful type of English politician. There are several types of French politicians equally in the running. They are not alike and one would not put them as men in the same class. The English politicians are also not of one class, but there is a class of them and those who are not in it seem outsiders. None of the French types can claim to be the standard, and this one cannot call that other bad form. There are several sorts of good form and bad form in French politics, mostly bad by the standard of the English political caste. But though the latter be

shocked, bad form in politics is not all loss. The mere clash of standards and types is often useful, and there is a double virtue in contradictory conflicts. In England party politics may be incoherent politics, but are generally a consistent game, and few political types are in real conflict. In France, parties and types contradict one another to begin with, and each often contradicts itself into the bargain. Dozens of examples of this doubly stimulating quality could be given. Royalist and clericalist conservatives in politics who are revolutionists in everything else, collect pictures at which conservative artists shudder, play music that terrifies the schools, profess philosophic unbeliefs which subvert academic faiths and were in their day decadents in letters, conservatives, in short, to whom it has never occurred that social conservatism might more fittingly go with traditionalism in the rest of human thought, are as common in England as in France, and the political radical whose religious beliefs, artistic and literary taste prove him to be essentially a conservative by temperament is peculiarly English. But the Roman Catholic, church-going, Republic-hating royalist who gladly adopts the methods of anarchism to save French society from republicanism, the "nationalist" whose patriotism compels him to believe that at least half his countrymen are sold traitors, the worshippers of authority who flout, because it is called a republic, the same authority that they would adore if it were called a monarchy, these are if not exclusively at any rate especially French types; others are the moderate republican who cries, "had we only a House of Lords!" and has fears that England may cease to be if she touch hers, the socialist-radical who for years has been the pattern of conservatives because his policy has exactly been to preserve things as they are, the "Unified Socialist" who accepts from his

party a yoke which he would call a hideous despotism if it came from anywhere else. Bohemian adventurers standing up for a ruthlessly strong and rigorously ordered society, literary anarchists turned champions of the ancient traditions of the soil, Cohens and Meyers who are leaders of the anti-Semites, millionaire socialists with fastidious tastes and beautiful motor-cars, men of substance and pillars of the solid middle class who sing the "Internationale" and "Carmagnole" at political banquets, pious Catholics and staunch royalists who daily pour fouler abuse on each other than they ever do on their political opponents: all these make for variety in the French political world and keep it alive.

II. Words

Political oratory is different in the two countries. We have political "humour," the French have political "eloquence." We have no political eloquence now outside newspaper print. Our leader writers change their convictions every few years or weeks, but continue tub-thumping in the same good old tradition of thick and sticky rhetoric flavoured with lumps of stodgy sarcasm. French political humour bites and hurts, but it exists only in the French political press; no French political speaker has the least streak of humour in him. Political oratory in the two countries may be classified roughly into the "humorous," the "spirited," the "statesmanlike" for England, the "Parliamentary," the "eloquent," the "statesmanlike" for France.

The "statesmanlike" English oratory is dying out, apparently because no great voice and character remain to give it life. Gladstone's speeches cannot be read with patience to-day. The mass of useless words, however they may have sounded, are dead in print. The mouthy circumlocution of his lessers survives in the vital

statements of our Cabinet ministers, who are still the masters of Europe in ambiguity whenever they have anything of European importance to say. The old English oratory ought to have been killed by that eternal meeting of the Pickwick Club. The marvel is that it outlived the "Pickwickian sense," and is yet not quite dead. The styles that have come after it are no improvement. The spirited or businesslike is always getting straight to the point in short sentences, "rigidly eschewing" any flowers or passion which would be out of place, and always sticking plainly to business; the business and the point are afterwards surprised to find that they have to look after themselves. The humorous modern oratory has unfortunately not yet found a contemporary Pickwick Club. The brilliant young spokesman of his party asks what its opponents want, and having paused says they want jobs; he calls them a job lot; he asks if his hearers will stand them fur coats and champagne and motor cars; he thinks they would rather pay their fares to Asia Minor (a pause), to Jericho. (Roars of laughter.) He thinks alternately they would give them a decoration, the great order of the MacChuck. The speech is acclaimed as one of the most biting, caustic and funny even he has ever delivered.

French public speaking has no humour. In the Chamber of Deputies M. Durand du Val (de Grasse) who has been successively Left, Centre, Opportunist, Radical Republican, Radical and Socialist-Radical, has for thirty years shown equally steady zeal and authoritative competence in Committee work. Even the following bald specimen of his businesslike style could not be done justice to in a translation.

"MESSIEURS,

"Nous vivons sous le régime de l'incertitude de la position de la question. Dans le but éclairé et

patriotique d'assurer au libre jeu de nos institutions parlementaires un essor plus large et plus fécond, plus d'amplitude et de portée et plus de potentialité réalisatrice, il importe, messieurs, d'apporter davantage de lumières vivifiantes et stabilisatrices dans le sein quelque peu confus de nos commissions mixtes. La méthode qui consiste, si je puis ainsi dire, à manquer de méthode, n'est pas adéquate au clair génie qui devrait présider d'un oeil impartial, mais plein du feu d'un zèle réformateur et démocrate, au cours laborieux de nos travaux. Je vous en conjure, messieurs, élevons nos activités patriotiques, mais dispersées, à la hauteur des réformes régéneratrices, pratiques et libératrices que réclame de notre dévoûment elu l'âme solidarisée et laique de la France."

Having spoken for three hours and a quarter Chrysostomos Bedoulle, a Unified Socialist by profession and an individualist with a voice by temperament, feels that he has presumed too much upon his strength and requests an adjournment of half an hour to recuperate. At the resumption: "Gentlemen, I had endeavoured with, alas, only too unskilled a brush, but with an enthusiasm second to none in sincerity, to paint in your minds' eye some faint sketch of that dim yet vivid, that unborn yet surely to be born future which already throbs in the womb of time, that future which we may not, but which our sons will see, which will heal the wounds of this searing day, which will console the now unconsolable, bring estranged hearts together, settle upon the disinherited their inheritance, perhaps, indeed, visit retribution upon the grasping heirs of yesterday, not, it may be, without some just severity, for to-morrow will be generous, but it will yet be a day of anger to the unrighteous, like that imaginary day once announced in splendid words by a childish and discounted, yet not wholly, gentlemen, even to us

Socialists, unsympathetic legend. I had feebly tried to paint that future. I will not return to it. I will not dwell with my all too weak voice again upon that picture. I will not endeavour again to describe its splendours. I will not again fail even in so sublime a cause. I will not again soar and fall. I will not again attempt to grapple with the great to-be, not again throw before you the awful vision—at which even as my inadequate words tried to draw it I saw some satisfied egoisms shudder—not again project, even haltingly, the dread foreboding of an age of goodness, of justice, of brotherhood. No, gentlemen, my heart swells with love of that sublime future, tears tremble on my eyelashes when my yearning dreams go out passionately towards it, but I will force myself back into the present, into this tragic, this cruel, this drab present. Yet is this a drab to-day? Is it not a day with germs of a glorious to-be, with the foreshadowings of sumptuous colours? And, gentlemen, this France of ours, has she not her part in these great forebodings? Is hers not the greatest part? Is it not from her womb that the sublime to-morrow may be brought forth into the light? Ah, gentlemen, do not claim the monopoly of patriotism! Do not call us internationalists anti-patriots. We are the truest sons of France. To-morrow us alone she will not disown. We alone believe in her, we the Socialists. We look to her as the mother, we watch her womb, we will be present at the birth, we are the strong accoucheurs, we will help forth greatness, sublimity, happiness. And of that glorious to-be, which it is we who will bring into the world, even it may be, and if need be, with the forceps of social revolution, it will be this France of ours that will be the great, the tortured, the ecstatic mother." (Applause on many benches, notably the Extreme Right, the exact Centre and the Extreme Left. The orator is specially

congratulated by the seventy-four United Socialists who all shake hands with him.)

The Minister of Foreign Affairs has caused it to be announced that at 5.13 he will make a statement on the Timbuctoo Waterworks. At 5.12 M. Dupont (de la Moselle) is stopping the gap. A minute later the Minister walks up to the tribune, a piece of paper in hand. " Gentlemen, the honourable M. Dumont desired to interpellate me on the Timbuctoo Waterworks. After consultation with him I determined to make a plain statement such as is due to the elected representatives of France. The Timbuctoo Waterworks are being built to ensure the supply of water in Timbuctoo. The undertaking is one which redounds to the honour of France and consolidates the peace of Europe. The honourable M. Dumont (with whom I have privately consulted) desired to know the part taken by Germany, Austria, and Turkey in the Timbuctoo Waterworks. Gentlemen, I will be perfectly frank with you. We are certainly in accord with the attitude of Italy in the matter. Our relations with Finland bear the imprint of the greatest cordiality. In conclusion, I will once more affirm from the bottom of my patriotic heart the solidity of our alliance with Russia, the stability of our cordial understanding with Great Britain, and the firm faith of the Government of the Republic in the greatness and prosperity of France." The Minister receives the congratulations of his colleagues of the Cabinet and of many members of the Government's majority, and even the Extreme Right and the Extreme Left minorities.

A studied comparison of Parliamentary speeches in the two countries will show that French political oratory has no conscious humour. The agreeable sallies of our brilliant M.P.s have no counterpart in the Chamber. Our young, caustic, and witty members have no brothers among French Deputies. " Rires " occurs

rarely in the reports of debates, and usually when a speaker has the Marseilles accent. On the other hand, Parliamentary eloquence, when up to a certain mark, is always taken seriously in the Chamber of Deputies. Rhetoric never raises a laugh, provided it hang together properly. The reason precisely is that French parliamentary rhetoric almost always does finish its sentence, round off its periods, close its parentheses, and that its most amazing flights can be parsed. The two idiosyncrasies of French Parliamentary speaking are " technical Parliamentary language, which judged by any canon applicable to the real French language is nonsense, and French " statesmanlike " language, which is a vehicle unequalled in Europe for the neat expression of nothing in specious words. The two idiosyncrasies of English party eloquence are its " humour " and its masterly command of ambiguity.

PRESS

VII

PRESS

IF one had to compare the English and the French Press in four words, one might say that the former is honest and stupid and the latter corrupt and intelligent. Of course the English Press is not entirely stupid nor wholly honest, and the French is sometimes stupid and sometimes honest. But one may say generally that the former has more and the latter less character than sense. There are still several English newspapers which are straight business concerns and straight journalistic concerns; in the French Press of to-day trade honesty and professional honesty are both small. Blackmail by newspaper, bribery of newspapers, the illegitimate sale of news by other means than its publication are comparatively rare in England and frequent in France. The offices of leading English newspapers are much more orderly and more efficiently managed than the chief Government departments of the English State; their walls have never heard a tenth part of the amazing intrigues familiar to French newspaper offices. The best French journalistic undertaking is a cut-throat and cut-purse game. The Naval Expert holds an I.O.U. from the "Secretary of the Editorship" (a superior sort of chief sub-editor), which he does not press and which could not be met if he did. The Foreign Editor remembers that the Colonial Expert was mixed up in a nasty Siamese business in 189— and has evidence to prove his recollection. The Dramatic Critic is the lover of the wife of the Musical Critic, who knows it. The Proprietor quarrels with the Foreign Editor and sacks him, appointing the Colonial Expert

to succeed him. The ex-Foreign Editor threatens the Colonial Expert with exposure; the Colonial Expert induces his particular friend, the Naval Expert, to threaten the Chief Sub-Editor, who is the ex-Foreign Editor's brother-in-law. The Chief Sub-Editor threatens the Dramatic Critic, a close friend of the Naval Expert, that he will "tell the husband," unless the Dramatic Critic talks to the Naval Expert. The Dramatic Critic replies that the Musical Critic knows already, and he won't talk to the Naval Expert. The ex-Foreign Editor is in check until he finds another move: the Chief Police-court Reporter owes his billet to having been used as an instrument in a shady stock-exchange deal by the Proprietor, the ex-Foreign Editor buys him off and with his help starts a series of articles (in a Conservative paper, if his original paper was Socialist, in a Socialist if it was Conservative), showing up the Proprietor. The first two still mild are printed, the advance proofs of the succeeding instalment are sent round to the Proprietor, who considers the situation for one hour, then gives in and reinstates his ex-Foreign Editor. The Colonial Expert becomes Colonial Expert again. The Cabinet, which he had violently attacked (or enthusiastically supported) because his predecessor enthusiastically supported (or violently attacked) it, is enthusiastically supported (or violently attacked) again. The public, which derives its opinions on foreign policy almost solely from that particular paper, concludes, after duly weighing two or three foreign articles, that there are unmistakable signs of a change in the European situation for the better (or worse). In the office all is smooth again, except for the Chief Police-court Reporter and the Musical Critic, both of whom are sacked, the one because everybody drops him and the other because the Dramatic Critic, the bigger man of the two, elbows him out, having decided that his

position will be more regular if he gets rid of the husband altogether, and after divorce marries the wife. The Assistant-Chief Police-court Reporter becomes Chief Police-court Reporter solely because he is a good journalist. The front page humorist is appointed Musical Critic because he is first cousin to an impresario.

It would be interesting to imagine, if one could, such complicated games being played in a solemn English newspaper office. They, or parts of them, are commonly played in the chief French newspaper offices. The general public knows nothing of them because the general public knows only what the papers tell it, and the papers stick more or less together. The Anarchist Editor calls the Royalist Editor a highway robber and a bloodthirsty cut-throat, and the Royalist Editor calls the Government criminal for not instantly beheading the Anarchist Editor. But the Royalist Editor and the Anarchist Editor seldom publish what little things they may happen to know about each other's private business.

Blackmail is a regular source of income to several French newspapers. A virtuously indignant show-up of some private or public undertaking is begun, and carried on crescendo for two or three days; the fourth dead silence; the fifth a repeat mezzo forte; the sixth silence; the seventh an echo ppp; after that, no more is heard. On the fourth day the undertaking had opened negotiations, on the sixth it paid with promise of more, on the eighth it paid up finally. The system of secret Government subsidies to newspapers is general and absurd. A journal of much importance will commonly draw £100, or even £80 a month, from the Home Office, no one seems to know why, either in the journal or at the Home Office. The bribe is too small to be of the slightest use either to the paper or to the Government. The system is a tradition, nevertheless; the paper

would feel slighted, the Home Office would be offended, if one or the other broke with it. Paid puffs, disguised as "news" or "literary copy," are the rule. The financial column is entirely paid for; for a notice of a concert the Proprietor will ask the Musical Critic how much he got and claim half. One journalist has made actually a literary reputation by writing puffs of patent medicines. Professional dishonesty is very common. Few reporters or editors stick at "faking." "Interviews" are constantly published with persons who have never seen the "interviewer" or who told him the contrary of what he made them say. "Telegrams by Special Wire from our own Correspondent" are half the time cooked up in Paris by a sub-editor from a Havas Agency message. In slack seasons Anarchist plots are invented, sometimes with the help of the police. When a "sensational case" is on, reporters dog, bully, browbeat, and sometimes blackmail all connected with it. Political unfairness is shameless and funny. A great deal of French political journalism still lives in Eatanswill. If an M.P. hits another in a café the Socialist paper reports that the Socialist-Radical Deputy made the Unified Socialist Deputy run like a rabbit, green with terror; the Unified-Socialist paper reports that the Unified-Socialist withered with scathing scorn the Socialist-Radical, whose knees bent beneath him, and he had to be restored with brandy by supporters. For over a year M. Henri Rochefort described daily how the President and the Ministers of the Republics were melting down the sacred vessels of all the churches of France and pocketing the proceeds. A trade unionist, a priest, arrested on a charge, are convicted before trial, the one by the Conservative, the other by the Socialist papers; if the prisoner's political opinions are not obvious, all the Press convicts him before trial. If he is afterwards found not guilty by the jury, his

acquittal is very frequently not even reported. The method and resources of the French Press are small compared with those of the English. It has not yet understood that to rise above blackmail, bribery, subsidies and professional and political dishonesty would be for it a business gain. It spends pence where the English Press spends pounds, saves money and loses time by foolish cheeseparing in the sending of news, uses old printing machinery, makes sixpence and loses a shillingsworth of caste by puffs, is at once brazen and timid, pestering and weak.

One who knew the methods of the French Press and had not read a French paper would suppose no French paper to be worth reading.

This weak and rotten French Press seems as if it ought not to count, yet it does—by sheer intelligence; mere brains work wonders. The French Press counts, not only because it takes in those who take it seriously and at whom it laughs in its sleeve, but also because its intelligence must be taken seriously however little its character can be. It imposes upon the world with amazing success. It can quite well build a house with an ounce of bricks and mortar, a political revelation with the shadow of the possibility of a fact; the English Press cannot build as well with a ton of facts. When the French Press has done building with nothing, the English looks and says there really must be something in it. The latter is quick at getting news by money and power, the latter is ten times quicker at guessing it. The "grand reportère," that is to say, the star soothsayer, the divining poet of the French Press knows how to invent: having invented sufficiently well and long, he thus arrives by a natural and well-recognised process at the truth, and when he has got there he looks back at the English journalist still on the way. The English journalist knew something when he still knew nothing;

when he knows everything the English journalist still knows only something; and the English journalist begins solemnly quoting him. Then it is he laughs in his sleeve. Often the English journalist begins quoting him while he is still inventing, and that is his greatest triumph. The English Press translates his guesses into solid English leaders, his guesses solidify in the process, Downing Street handles the solid English leaders, his guesses become facts—and thus the grand reportère has moved the world. He triumphs constantly in international politics. So true is it that imagination is the essential gift.

It is much more important that the journalist should anticipate intelligently than that he should anticipate honestly; if he guesses wrong it will serve him little to have had honest grounds to go upon, and when he has guessed right nobody cares if he were bluffing when he began. He can't do worse than prove a bad prophet, and nothing either extenuates or aggravates the crime of being one.

The Paris Press applies its intelligence first of all to Paris. The London Press does not get a quarter as much out of London as the Paris Press does out of Paris; the one makes London dull, the other makes Paris interesting. A trail of fatalistic boredom lies over everything written about what happens in London, nothing that happens there ever awakens a London journalist's imagination. It is all in his day's humdrum work; he has not the slightest hope that anything in London that he will ever have to write about will ever entertain him, he is resigned to his Fleet Street fate. Kings are crowned and die and are buried, the people dimly thinks new thoughts and shows that it does, men play astonishing tragedies and great comedies, life goes on uncramped in the most monstrous of cities: all he finds to say is that London is indeed the capital

of the Empire. State shows, wealth and power violently displayed, strange rumblings from beneath, crime, farce, murder, burglary, divorce, these do not suggest anything to him. He looks at pageant and cannot see the host for the uniforms, the mass for the details; he is humbly besought to attend peeresses' balls and describe the dresses, he tells us what Lady Blank wore and can't tell us what Lord Blank thought; went over Blank House and can't tell us what it looks like, took down guests' names and forgot to read their faces. He goes to public meetings and takes down the speeches in shorthand, and never reports the audience who are far more important, or even thinks of keeping a sketch-book in which to draw their portraits; he could recite to us most political speeches beforehand, he can tell us nothing about the listeners, because he has not the slightest idea himself what they are. The historic discovery of Socialism by the English middle-classes at the General Election of 1906 was due partly to this cause. He reports crimes, accidents, lawsuits, and never seems to understand what they mean. In these cases of course the fear of libel laws and contempt of court afford him a welcome excuse, but even after the case is over, after the man is hanged or the decree made absolute, the leader-writer never interposes with anything but solemn platitudes; criminal or civil cases which told us more about our times than volumes of sociology have suggested nothing to London journalism. A well-known London journalist, who was peculiar because he had imagination, wished to write what one of the most curious murders known suggested to him. He told me that his editor did not think the subject of sufficient human interest.

The Paris Press lives first of all to write about Paris. A few papers follow what happens outside Paris; all make Paris interesting. They watch every instant and

every inch of Paris with tender and amusing care. They do not "report" Paris, they live with her, feel with her, often live for her; they often make Paris. Nothing she does is foreign to them, everything Parisian gives them good "copy." If a king goes to Paris, as they often do, the Parisian journalist does more than "interview" the king, he reads, construes, and dissects him. He gives deft little pictures of him which are psychologically true, however imaginary the facts; not only invents but finds out tiny anecdotes that paint the man; is not afraid to tell pleasantly sharp stories about the very king that he is fondest of. The kings as a matter of fact like it, and any king worth his salt prefers to be disrespectfully made amusing in Paris than respectfully made dull in London. The Paris Press with its conscienceless heedlessness gets nearer to the real man than the conscientious London Press. The real Edward VII was much better made known by the former than by the latter, and had the Paris Press never been busied with him the outside public never would have been able to draw his true portrait. No one can understand why a king who goes to London becomes in the London Press a royal shadow which nothing the man in the street reads in his paper helps him to put flesh and blood to. The crowd on the kerbstone sees the king pass and tells itself with amazement, "he is dark, he is fair, he is fat, he is thin, he looks jolly, he looks sour, he is a scorcher, he is a milksop"; his paper never whispered to him that the king could be a man at all. The man in the London street sees always more than his paper saw; the Parisian in the street generally learns from his paper. In the case of kings, deference is no excuse for the London Press; the Parisian journalist loves a king, none more, and tells us the more about him the more he loves him. He is not the less but the more a courtier when he does his best to make us understand the man

the king is, so far as he understands him. Of all the mass of journalism written about Edward VII, the latter was alive only in what the Paris Press wrote about him; the Paris Press, nevertheless, lay down before Edward VII and worshipped him.

The Paris journalist is always discovering Paris with delight. The London journalist almost never discovers London. To the former every little Parisian thing suggests a journalistic idea, in every stone he can find "copy" and of its kind good "copy." A new lamp-post put up inspires him with a paragraph in best imitation Anatole France, he feels he must make a La Bruyère character out of any boulevard type he had not met before, a new poster is worth a Banvillesque ode. M. Raqul Ponchon for years had published little poems in one of the "yellowest" dailies every Monday, about the passing moment of Paris, many of which those who care have cut out and put by, for they will keep a place in literature, but he has always refused to collect any of them in book form. This is just what the English Press has found a "journalese" phrase for, "feeling the public pulse," but just what the English Press does not do. "One idea a day" was the old French journalese phrase of Emile de Girardin and Villemessant; finding or making one "sensational" fact a day, and getting no idea at all out of it is a different policy: a very small daily fact will do to get the daily idea out of, but the journalist must know how. The Paris Press gets great fun out of its "faits divers." What would the Phantom millions, the Steinheil case have been without the Paris Press? Such things happen just as much in London; their peculiar charm when they happen in Paris comes not from the events themselves, but solely from what the Paris Press puts into them. Think what the Paris Press would have made of the Druce Portland case.

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It is the twopenny-ha'penny corrupt French Press, not the powerful and correct English, still less the all-powerful, disreputable and mad American Press that in the word of American journalese is " alive." It makes Paris and the different worlds of Paris " alive." Of course, it makes the theatrical world alive, half the Paris Press lives to do that. Paris moralists regularly shake their heads over paragraphs about the actress who appeared clad in a tiger-skin and the author who keeps a pet crocodile, about the much-discussed dramatist whose wife is his severest critic's mistress and the literary duchess who is infatuated with the younger son of the jeune premier of fifty-five. But the tittle-tattle of Boulevard theatres is at least amusing, it goes beyond the advertisement of an actor by the periodical announcement of his engagement to the Suburban girl, or the Mormon girl, or whichever girl it may for the time be. No doubt it is wrong to busy us with the hetaira's successes, with the old man's loves of the great sentimental dramatist, with the young bounder poet's last useful conquest. But these feeble figures in the Paris Press do at least live—they live at least in the Paris Press, for it is the Paris Press which really makes them live. They would be only shadows if ingenious scandalmongering did not give them body. They understand this quite well themselves and contentedly suffer the Press to invent stories about them much more cleverly than they could on their own. The little Paris journalist who calls himself a " theatre-runner " usually has a great deal more intelligence than the Parisian actor whom he runs after and round, and who often is curiously stupid. Either London actors have not yet understood how to be advertised or else theatrical journalists are not capable of doing it for them. Not the smallest thing happens in the Paris theatrical world but what the Paris papers bubble all

over with little stories about the authors and the actors concerned, absurd stories, delicious stories, spiteful ones, scandalous ones, about the socks of M. Paul B., the many wives of M. Alfred E., and how much he habitually pensions each off with, the wild efforts of M. Alfred C. to be respectable and Academic in his elderly age, the catastrophes of M. Charles L.'s married life, the latest amours of the entertaining Madame A. and Monsieur G., the unique conceit of Signor A. who is tired of conquering, and the most spiteful little stories are not always the least useful advertisement. The theatrical news of Paris papers is the most intelligent scandalmongering in contemporary journalism.

Political Paris is also made "alive." Perhaps English politicians would sacrifice some of the huge awe with which they are still surrounded, for a little of the lively limelight that plays about French ones, and would not mind being taken a little less seriously by the English Press if it could make them a little more interesting. No man is less respected by the Paris Press than the politician, but it never bores us with him. He is flouted and guyed and blackguarded, he is never made dull, he is always amusing or picturesque; if no fun or colour can be got out of him at all he is ignored. The Paris Press has been the making of most French politicians, and very often best made them when it most meant to mar them. In a world of dull journalism, M. Clemenceau would never have become the man he was. His quips and cranks had to be taken up instantly or they would have fallen flat. He would have been picturesque in vain if he had had no Press able immediately to see and show that he was. Every quilpish move he made, every elfin word he said was instantly made the most of with great profit to him, especially by his enemies. His gay betrayals in office of all the principles he professed out of it were held up to scorn

in minute detail, minute by minute, and he chuckled; M. Jaurès particularly proved every day what an abandoned despot he was, and he rubbed his hands as each fresh lunge at him made the bigger man of him. The London Press, better disciplined, is always careful not to make political opponents picturesque; unluckily it makes political friends dull also. M. Briand was even a more brilliant creation of the Paris Press, accomplished in barely a couple of years. Of course, like M. Clemenceau he lent a helping hand in his own making, but he also would have flourished only half as well in an unimaginative medium. His cameleon-like adaptability would have been in great part wasted if a quick Press had not at once perceived and demonstrated how exciting it was to watch him at it, whether ingeniously adapting hard and fast laws to fluid facts, or ingenuously adapting his principles to his place. He would not have been half such a great man if the Press had not dramatised strikes, but the Paris journalist's dramatic sense is always invaluable to French public men; English Cabinet Ministers put down worse strikes, but the English Press carefully keeps its imagination damp and the poor wretches get no glory. The English Press at the same time is always taken in by the dramatic sense of the French. The latter sees the picturesque possibilities of a Briand and a strike, the former then sees them also; a few fine dabs of colour, M. Briand is the heaven-sent saviour or the bloody assassin, has rescued France from anarchy or prostituted her to tyranny, and forthwith the English Press swallows it all and hails Aristide Briand the hero. It never helps on its own public men in this way. If the Paris Press had ever had the managing of London for six weeks Mr. Balfour would soon have been in shining armour, and Mr. Asquith riding a coal-black charger. For a good while it laboured almost successfully to dramatise our own

politics for us, then tired of the subject, finding us hopelessly unresponsive. The Paris Press makes Paris public men interesting. Guying M. Jaurès is the daily game of the Conservative French Press, from his eloquence to his nose, from his fat paunch to his slithy dialectics, but who supposes that it hurts him? No statesman was ever more melodramatically denounced than M. Delcassé, but the quick drama, which in one scene not only brought him on again but dismissed M. Clemenceau, was instantly made the most of. The political Paris Press slanders, libels, lies, misrepresents, has almost no respect for private lives, but Paris politicians in the long run gain instead of losing by it. The proof is that more of them become picturesque figures in Europe than of other countries' politicians. The American Press also libels and lies, but nobody in Europe marks it, and it does not make its politicians picturesque. Mr. Roosevelt was oppressive, but could hardly have been called interesting.

The Paris Press keeps even its shorthand reporters awake; its Parliamentary reports are often delicious reading. They would be a scandal in Fleet Street or at Westminster, respectable Parliamentary staffs of newspapers would be aghast, the House would visit hideous penalties on the offenders. Some London party papers shyly try to prejudice an opponent and favour a supporter in Parliamentary reports, but the timid attempt would be smiled at in Paris. The French Parliamentary reporter describes how the House now snored ostentatiously while M. Durand spoke, now turned his back deliberately upon the "orator"; M. Dupont, on the contrary, electrified the assembly, and members tumbled over each other to shake hands with him when he came down from the tribune. What M. Durand said is not mentioned in the paper of M. Dupont's party, M. Dupont's speech is printed in a much more coherent

form than he spoke it. The reporter interlards his report: "here M. Jaurès fell up to his neck once more in that slough of flatulent hyperbole which is his natural element. Here M. Pelletan, having had too much absinthe. . . . Here M. Briand tried on his old wheedling harlot manner, but it was too stale to trick the House any more," then resumes his report. He does not the least harm to the victims of his interpolations. The Paris Press has done great damage in the public credit to the Parliamentary system generallly; individual politicians whom it flouted it has not hurt but helped, if there was anything at all in them. Reporters' interjaculatory groans and gasps over Jaurès' eloquence only drove the idea home in the public mind that whatever else he may be he is an orator, and jibes at the Briand blarney only persuaded the public which had not heard him that he must be a wonder. In England, some newspaper readers wade through Parliamentary reports with grim, businesslike thoroughness; no one is attracted by them, there is little real fun in them, and the humour of comic members at question time is often poor.

What the public wants! That gag, if English journalism does not take care, will be its knell. The proof of the pudding is not in the eating when the pudding is rammed down one's throat. French papers never bother their heads about what the public wants. They give the public what they think the public ought to want, and the public gobbles up what is given it. They give it poisonous yellow stuff, and it eats; they give it delicate and wholesome stuff, and it eats. They give it the worst sensationalism, and they give it a signed criticism of Pragmatism by Professor Bergson; the public wants the one just as much as the other. The English Press lives in a needless dread that it is not low enough for the public level. Every journalist who ever thought

about anything when he was young remembers his first Mentor's advice, never write above the heads of your readers. The constant effort to write down to them is what paralyses the English Press. The English Press is strangely out of touch with the English public. The man in the street thinks and says more than ever he reads in his paper; men out of the street are occupied with many curious things which they might expect, but would expect in vain, to find reflected in their papers. The former looks into the things around him much more than his paper supposes, and he is not the placid, complacent gazer it takes him to be. The smooth, comfortable blur it puts all over life, and just as much when making great shows of political fury as when considerately patting the public on the back, is not in his mind's eye at all. He sees rather sharply, he is not comfortable, he is rather caustic, restless, hungry. Any London clerk, any 'bus conductor, has thought more keenly about his own little world than ever his paper taught him, has thought sometimes bitterly, generally with humour, while his paper solemnly and sleekly talked down to him. He judges freshly and boldly and speaks out; no leader writer seems ever to have listened to him. One can hear in a crowd any day things discussed with sense and fun and pluck which the Press goes on wrapping round and round with the same timid humming and hawing. The foreigner can gather no idea of the live spirit of the common English people from the English Press. The foreigner in France can get a very good idea of the vivacity of the French people from its Press—and no idea at all of its solidity. The man out of the street, almost as much as the man in the street, thinks over the heads of those who are afraid of writing over his. He is properly catered for by book reviewers, dramatic critics and philosophers, of course, but of every new thought his paper fights shy, and it is

he who has to teach it to his paper. Men who have freshly thought, men who have at least thought some small new thing, have been ignored by the English Press for years during which the thinking English public knew and watched them. Sometimes the Press of other countries has discovered them first, and ours has stood amazed. Ideas have been ignored certainly as much as men. Yet when here and there in a paper a man does write ahead of thinking men, does the paper's circulation go down ? Fleet Street is a little world out of the world ; the Paris Press lives in the world. It is weak, dishonest, and conscienceless, but it is run by men who are in the world, not merely in the world of journalism. It is much nearer real life than the powerful English Press, nearer not only to the ideas, but to the actual facts of life. To report a " good crime " is something, and that the English Press does, but to understand that a good crime means something is everything, and that the French Press does.

But the English Press seems to be improving and the French to be going down. English newspaper articles of twenty years ago are to-day unreadable, and they were worse written than those of to-day. French journalists write rather worse than they did when they had not yet learnt " American methods." The French Press is perhaps not less intelligent, but certainly not more honest ; the English Press is probably not less honest and perhaps more intelligent than twenty years ago.

AVERAGES

VIII

AVERAGES

FEW knowing both countries equally well will deny that the average intelligence is higher in France than in England. The class at the middle level of culture, thinking, and possession of the means to get the one and do the other is brighter, quicker, sharper, thinner-skulled in the former than in the latter country. It is familiar with more ideas and handles them more easily; many have sunk into it which the corresponding English class is proof against. The French bourgeoisie has learned to look without any terrors upon the monster art, which the sister class in England cannot yet eye with any comfort. It is scarcely more remarkable for taste, but it has superior training. Its sofas, its carpets and its hangings are sometimes even worse than what fills corresponding English drawing-rooms, but it is used to the idea of art, the idea that art is not an unhealthy tumour but a normal and natural growth. It cheerfully allows art a place in the world; it may not itself have the "artistic temperament," but it is ready to take the latter quite seriously, not as something comic to be funny about or improper to veil, as the same class does in England. It is not particularly fond of artists, and fights as shy of them as any English bourgeoisie, but it is quite agreeable they should be artists, apart from any money they may make by their art.

The French bourgeoisie at the Salon and the English at the Academy can be compared. The latter instantly asks, "What is the picture about?" The former is ashamed to. The former, though it has got beyond the

sentimental anecdote, still loves the theatrical one, but knows it shouldn't. It knows that in a picture it ought first of all to see the painting, a simple truth seldom plain to Royal Academy visitors. It often tries honestly to apply this knowledge, says to itself forcibly : " We will not be concerned whether this portrait is like, we will not consider how nice we think uniforms look in this pretty battle-piece, we will, we must observe whether both are well painted." It has, in fact, understood that art yields something really more interesting than anecdotes do, if only you can get at the thing ; it does not always get there, but it tries. The average Royal Academy visitor knows that to pretend that the essential thing in a picture is not the story it tells is absurd. The serenity of the average Salon visitor has been once for all disturbed by the discovery that art is natural and he can never recover the imperviousness of his English brother ; he no longer, as the latter does, looks upon it as a monster, but on the other hand he can no longer, as the latter can, wave it aside. He is troubled therefore constantly by the devilish ingenuity of painters. He goes to the two Salons, but he must also go to the Independents and to the autumn Salon. He is that collector who bought Corots and sold them to buy Manets, sold the Manets to buy Cézannes, sold the Cézannes to buy Henri-Matisses, all the time honestly, all the time afraid art might be stealing marches on him. He is inevitably the natural prey of the Henri-Matisses who make ten times fewer victims in England. But imperviousness is not all gain. The French bourgeoisie gets much more fun out of its partly trained sensibility to the art of painting than the English out of its virgin insensibility.

In music the average French listener has made bad blunders and he still has his pet sins : he will not have Brahms at any price, he believes that nearly all Saint

Saens, even the worst, will last, and he honestly admires much Massenet. His English brother also admires Massenet and makes mistakes of his own as well, obstinately overrating Tshaikovsky, for instance. But when the two begin to make music on their own, the former's taste and training are superior. Both have the common faults of average audiences which a rubato and a pianissimo cadenza fetch as surely as the right bait lands the fish, but at home the English average amateur is much the worse of the two. In a London drawing-room a man or a woman will stand up to "sing" without having the slightest idea how to do it; they would not dare at the quivalent Paris evening party. The standard of drawing-room singing and playing is much higher in Paris; the young person must play Debussy quite well, beginners on the violin are never allowed to practise before a large company in ball dress. It is indeed surprising what is expected of the musical young lady in Paris; the painting or reading or writing young lady amazes her surroundings by one-tenth of the same proficiency. The English girl at the piano is not generally asked to be better at it than she is expected to be at painting, poetry or metaphysics. The French girl who has never read more than the same sort of novel the English girl reads must be a pianist by the side of the latter to be listened to by a Paris drawing-room audience for five minutes.

The French bourgeoisie has learned that books may be read, as pictures may be looked at, critically. That there is an art of writing, is an idea even more familiar to it than that there is one of painting. It is well used to acknowledging that writing needs style, an admission for which its English sister is unprepared. That there is a literary art has indeed been dinned into it from childhood through a long and deliberately planned education. University purists now complain that the

young Frenchman is no longer taught to write French, but he is still ten times as much taught to write French as the young Englishman is to write English. His people agree that writing does not come natural to everybody, but has to be learned. They remember this habitually, almost by instinct, when they read. The least well-read among them have a strong command of the jargon of literary technique, which is certainly more disagreeable to listen to than the prattle of ignorance, but certainly more entertaining to utter. The best read have almost got to the point of nosing out fine writing. All are accustomed to the idea that there is an art in putting words together, can judge an exciting story coolly, can read with pleasure a well-written tame story, and honestly care how a newspaper is written. The French artist can write for the French bourgeois, and Maupassant was appreciated as no English Maupassant would have been by the average English public. The standard of writing written for the many is much higher in France than in England. The worst French novels are better written than the average English novel, the worst English novels are worse written than the worst French "journalese," and the best French journalism is good writing. In literary tastes and training English averages cannot come up to French.

The French bourgeoisie looks at the bare facts as well as the ornaments of life more intelligently than the English, if the latter can be said to look at the bare facts of life at all. The French is not afraid of looking straight at a certain number of them, while deliberately shutting its eyes to others. It is probably the most unpoetic, most matter-of-fact, most unsentimental middle-class in the world. Art is an ornament of life which it recognises well, and even understands roughly; poetry it does not acknowledge to be an ornament of life. Agreeable verse is an agreeable detail of art and an acceptable

pastime ; the poetic spirit is either nonsense or a danger, more probably the former ; anyhow it must be and is kept carefully out of life. The French average has no difficulty in keeping it out ; the English sometimes lets one or two drops of it filter in, nothing dangerous of course, not enough to poison one healthy mind, but still one drop or two of it, whereas the French is non-porous to it. The English, completely closed to much that the French is open to, yet admits faint strains of fancy, of mystery, and of poetry which the French shuts out. Vague, rudimentary these English yearnings are, producing scarcely anything that is not crude and raw, but English average sentimentality even at its worst, and even the silliest forms of English fancy, may contain traces of those one or two drops of filtered poetry. The French average is not sentimental, knows no fancy that has one single strain of mystery. In spite, or because of that, it looks at the bare facts of life ten times more intelligently than the English. Perhaps averages must keep out even the faintest shadows of dreams if they are to know the substance of life well. Anyhow, the French does keep out the former and does know the latter.

The divine average in French is perfectly human. It takes the substance, the matter of life for granted once for all, and looks the facts all round and talks about them. It is utterly ignorant of the English average's shyness and feels no shame in life ; it accepts life as life is, and cannot conceive that anyone should not. It quarrels with the contingencies, never with the essence, of life. It never questions that getting on is an important thing, never doubts that the self-interest of man and family rules society and never pretends that it does not ; never supposes or feigns that marrying and having children is a romance and not a business as serious as managing a shop or a counting-house ; never makes

believe that sex is a fifth-rate human preoccupation, never calls a virgin a woman, never ignores the polygamy of men. It constantly touches earth and takes its stand blandly on all the primeval truisms. It talks calmly about its body and shocks the English average. It enjoys its food habitually at home with as much care as the English gourmet does at his club, and even many of its women can distinguish claret from Burgundy. It obeys a strict code of proprieties, and does not talk " Vie Parisienne " dialogue at home (as English averages sometimes suppose), but it does not lay down the axiom that sex does not exist. The primeval truism is always acted upon that a maid does not know sex; when she has ceased to be a maid nobody in the French bourgeoisie pretends that she does not know what sex is, or that sex is not a quite important matter to her, or any less important, or even not more important, to a virtuous wife than to a harlot. Another primeval truism is always acted upon; it is never forgotten that the male and female sexes are different. No one pretends that a woman or man can be unsexed, that a maid can really be the equal of a woman, that a bachelor and a maid stand in the same relation towards life. In fact, the French average never forgets the flesh. The English remembers it also, sometimes indeed with a force that astonishes the French, but it more often pretends, and also honestly tries, to forget it, and thinks it does. A cardinal principle of English education, for instance, is to let sex take care of itself; never a word or a confessed thought about it. Young sex grows up wondering secretly at itself, among bland adults who have ceased to wonder and who forget they ever wondered, and is ignored; it grows under parents' eyes and parents calmly shut their eyes. It learns to know itself with pain and shame in those little tragedies of youth which English averages hastily bury and have

forgotten by the time their turn comes to shut their eyes. The French, indeed, teach no A B C of sex by examples drawn from botany : they do not, contrary to some beliefs, talk sex round the family dinner-table, but father and mother are equally quickly aware when the boy has become a man, the girl, of course, being, if possible, married off at the proper time, once seventeen now two-and-twenty. The boy's manhood mother and father think of and talk of together ; what they would be ashamed of would be ignoring that sexual life is beginning for him. They do not usually choose his first mistress for him, but French bourgeois parental care has been known to go as far as that. Fathers have put their boys in the way of likely ladies whom older experience can judge to be satisfactory and safe, and the fathers would be amazed to be told they were immoral. Should boys be virgin when they marry ? Possibly, but are they ? If not, is it not a father's duty to guide them as far as may be in all things of life, including those things which pretending they are not will not do away with ? Is it not even a mother's duty to teach her son not only her world but a man's world as far as she can ? The idea of letting on to her son that she knows the man's world (if she should know it) shocks the average English mother ; the French calls it her duty to teach her son everything she knows. When she learns that he has a mistress, she will contrive to see the mistress discreetly and critically, and when she has seen she will either let him understand that she approves, or frankly tell him she disapproves, and counsel him whatever course she thinks right. She will not be ashamed before her son nor he before her : in the solidest French families, clinging religiously together round their homes, mother and son will talk to one another, the one guiding and the other confiding, about things the mere mention of which in some much less solid English average homes

would be called blaspheming against home. This frankness in life, this care in planning life come from the great French faith in life ; it is the only really essential faith French averages hold to. The only thing that really matters to them is that they and their children shall live as completely well as the former can and the latter may be taught to. " When the question is how best to arrange my son's life, shame, scruples, convention, are not worth a pin," says the French bourgeois father. To a younger French bourgeois mother with children of 3 and 5, calling on her At Home day, an elder French bourgeois mother said, " You do well to keep up your social connections for the sake of your son's and daughter's future." She would have been surprised to have been told that what she said would have surprised an English mother, and even seemed to her comic. Humour ? Shame ? Shyness ? Proprieties ? Good form ? Bad taste ? What, in the name of " the family," can all these weigh in the balance with faith in life, when the lives are those of our own flesh and blood ?

" In reality, life across the Channel is as ordered and as earnest as it is in England," a reviewer kindly said I had proved in an earlier volume. The average life " across the Channel " is more earnest and much more ordered than in England. England, not France, is the land of shifting middle social layers. In England, not in France, families shoot up and drop down. The sons of a man who climbed without an aitch are comfortably educated at universities ; the sons of a man who was at the top of his profession are sent to the Council School by his beggared widow. The scion of a popular patent medicine might have a century of culture behind him ; the heir to several centuries of culture makes a living by blackmail. These things are not as probable in France. The material ordering of French life is much firmer. Every day, in England, a business man who

spent his several thousands a year on himself, wife, and children, dies leaving them as much to live upon as paid for his cellar while he lived ; every day a professional man who threw his money about, and with it got out of life as much for him and his as he could, dies leaving his family without enough to pay his funeral—paupers depending upon some professional fund. Such things, when they happen in France, are scandals. Who in England dreams of calling them scandalous ? If a father be so improvident, having lived well, as to die leaving his wife and children no more than they enjoyed in his lifetime, the French bourgeoisie holds him up as an example of the thorough deterioration of modern morality. If he died leaving them nothing, his acquaintances could not be got to believe that he did not squander his earnings on a career of secret and shameful vices. In the French bourgeoisie it is considered rash to live up to one's income, if it be a revenue derived from capital. To put by nothing or little of an earned income is called a crime. The middle layer of society thus does not shift. Few fortunes are made, much fewer lost. At a certain level, a son rarely rises above, and almost never falls below, his father. Even in the political world few successful men are really self-made. In the business world, while families seldom decay, men make money, but rise only slowly by it, even in their own surroundings, where they will still be parvenus among business families of superior or older standing. Out of their world they cannot rise at all. The shopkeeper, however rich, is still classed below the engineer, and he, obviously, cannot get a title to lift him. A titled grocer French society has never conceived possible, were the Third Republic to grant titles ; and no grocer in France has ever reached such a position as would get him a title if he were in England. On the other hand, the real French aristocracy (the multitude of adventurers with sham

titles being left out) does drop a rotten branch occasionally; the bourgeoisie remains the solidest and steadiest in Europe.

Not only the material but the mental middle life of France is solider; that is the French secret. The French average is surer of life than the English—is completely sure of life. No doubts here; no silly season "Is life worth living?" for not one newspaper reader but would have shrugged his shoulders, "Is my paper mad? I will subscribe to its rival"; no question about the value of life, no hesitation about the interest of life, no qualms about the sense of life. Of course life is "worth living." To ask whether it be is an idiotic question. The English average could ask itself the question ingenuously, and not at first see that the question is nonsense, as the French would have seen instantly. Of course life has value and interest and sense. Even if it had not, what's the odds?—it is life. The French average starts from life whithersoever it go; comes back to life wherever it came from; knows and conceives no other beginning and no other goal; posits life as the first premiss of every argument. It cannot itself understand the absolute value which it attaches to life, knowing no other estimate. It reasons about life—none more sensibly; but it cannot completely understand how deep its own religion of life is, how every day its one motive is the wish to make for itself and for its flesh and blood absolutely as much out of life as it can. Its thrift, orderliness, sagacity, intelligence, vivacity, steadiness, have no other cause: the sum total which the man and his children, with and after him, squeeze out of life must be, when all additions and subtractions are made, the maximum that life can yield him and them. No questions of values outside life, no leisure for by-paths in life, no time for dreams. Life is too real. Hasten to gather and eat its fruit; there is so much

that you will not have time to eat all. Stop to watch the sun-spots on the leaves, and the fruit will rot and drop, and you, when you drop like the fruits of the tree, will not have eaten your fill. French averages are the most ruthless realists in the world; they have sharpened their wits much more than our averages have, solely that they might be the more intelligent realists, and therefore the more successful realists.

We are not, even the pillars of our society are not, realists. "As solid as the English middle-classes!" Perhaps none are less solid. Dullness is not solidity, money is not solidity, solidity is in the mind. The solid average is the average that is sure of its place among facts and among ideas; to be sure of the former only is insecurity. The English average is not even sure of the former. The man knows that he is prosperous, the class does not know that it is; even the rich and secure man is surrounded by shifting sands where relations and acquaintances stand unsteadily. In France when he belongs to the solid averages, all connected and acquainted with him are as solid as he; he has not one poor relation for half a dozen he would have in England, and the dull country cousins he tries to run away from are usually better off than he. But money alone, even money evenly spread through a class and down generations, is not solidity. Perhaps a class might almost feel itself solid without money; at any rate, the French bourgeoisie feels itself much more solid with rather less money than the English. Does any class feel itself inwardly as insecure as the latter? The moment the English average thinks, it is lost; it lives well only by forbidding itself to think. The number of things it is afraid to think of fills almost all the world. Questions can be put to it all day from each of which it turns away in terror. A blushful silence is the answer, which means, "I have always held it right not to consider the

question." Its extraordinary mobility really is flying away from questions. Is my life interesting ? Dash off in a motor. What is death ? Rush off for a week-end of golf. Do the politics of my party really mean anything ? Catch the night train for the Swiss winter sports. Is sex of any importance ? Go salmon-fishing in Norway.

One is often amazed by the average English ability not to think, by thought-tight compartments in a walled-up mind, by a mind not only closed against the outside, but shutting off one question from another within. But these fortifications are in part measures of safety. The English average's natural capacity for not thinking is strengthened by the fear of what would happen if it thought. What happens to it when it does think it cannot itself understand ; its own thought lays incomprehensible traps for it. It cannot think safely, it does not live better when it thinks more, but endangers instead of safeguarding its living by thinking : one inch more thought and it is over the edge, out of life into dreams : it dare not think for fear of dreaming, and whenever it does think it dreams : one step and it floats in " fads " and " movements." Every English fad has been fed from the English middle-classes, English averages have made English cranks, English fanaticism has come out of English solidity. From the Anti-Corn Law League to suffragettes, from anti-vivisection to the late Pharos Club, no " movement " but what the solidest English averages formed or reinforced it. The English averages wall themselves up thickly, opaquely and narrowly, but not so solidly that one brick may not fall out and let them see beyond. " Movements" are puerile dreams, but they are dreams ; the fads of cranks are foolish, but they are dreams. The English averages cannot think, but they have glimmers of dreams ; they think less than children about life, but

they have faint specks of fancy, and their childish "crazes" are tiny germs of something beyond life.

The French bourgeoisie is both more intelligent and more solid than the English. While it knows more about the ornaments, thinks more about the substance, and is better at the theory, it is better also at the practice of life. Its more intelligent theorising about life not only does not hinder but helps its living. When the English bourgeoisie does think, it thinks away from life; if ever it theorise, it theorises not for but against life. In order to live, it must live by instinct; what little thinking it does is dreaming, and it lives not so much the more but so much the less. The French runs no such risk; the more it thinks the better it lives. It has never made and seldom helped to make a "fad." It builds its intellectual walls as far as, but exactly on, the horizon of life, and builds them so well that never a brick falls out; within them none sees more clearly, but it does not see beyond. It never can think further than it lives, however much it may think: the English can, if it think enough. The dull English average is nearer the brink of dreams than the bright French. Life strictly limits the French outlook; the English rarely gets to the horizon of life, but once in a blue moon it peers beyond, the French never. Thus one may say that the French bourgeoisie realises a finished work compared with which the English is a clumsy makeshift, but the latter has vague possibilities not found in the former. What dreaming the English bourgeoisie does is futile, and the averages of mankind are not the place for dreaming: if you dream, get out of them, or your dreams will remain useless. The French bourgeoisie is convinced of the futility of dreaming; the English is also, as far as it has thought about the matter which the French has definitely thought out. But the French average is consistent and thinks but cannot dream, whereas the

English is not and does not think but can dream, however dimly. It is perhaps worse than useless for the average to dream while he remains what he is, but he can get out of his medium. Then he will have a possession with him which he never could have taken with him out of the corresponding French medium. If you want to be a pillar of society, by all means be a French one; you will be a soldier, better-shaped, better-finished-off and more ornate one in a more coherent whole. But if you feel as if you might be a poet, come out of the English not the French middle strata; you will bring with you out of them something you never would have brought from the latter, some small faint unearthliness.

CRANKS

IX

CRANKS

THE word is ours, the thing is ours. No one else has the word, no one else has as much of the thing. A real word is made only for a real thing, is called up out of that wonderful storehouse of unborn signs, the imagination of a people, only when a real thing calls it. No real word can naturally mean a false thing; it may be forced into a false meaning, it always has a true one. Words fabricated in workshops, literary, scientific, artistic, philosophic workshops, may mean real things, but always also mean false ones. Of themselves they are false; they become true only by knocking about in the world of real words. They are false when they come out of the workshops, those called up out of the treasure of unborn popular symbols are born true. No essentially truer words can exist than real slang words. Sham slang, the clipped jabber of a season, is almost as untrue as the ready-made tongue of word-coining workshops. Real slang must be true; if it sounds false to us, we have lost its truth. If we want to find out the true things in a people we can go to its slang. The French took a German word (it is supposed) and made *chic* of it, and few things are more essentially French than *chic*; the French themselves scarcely understand how essentially French it is. They apply it to their clothes, their manners, pejoratively to their painting; they should apply it also to their minds, to their metaphysics, to their perception of the universe. Nothing expresses one side of the United States better than bully. Those two perfect words mug and poire prove the intellectual aristocracy of the common

peoples of France and England, their right and beautiful contempt for fools; the two peoples which invented two such final words instinctively felt that they are, all things considered, the two naturally most intelligent peoples of modern times. English oaths and English obscenity are the strongest in the world, and it is regrettable that the custom of the day should forbid it being demonstrated that they are among the surest signs of the vitality of our people. About an English pal there is something that no other speech can say because no other people has wanted exactly to say it; though less good, to be pally is still exquisite English, and a fine English thing. This is not the fancy of a blind patriotism. One need not be a Frenchman to recognise at once, for instance, that the French have not only *la blague* but *le panache* and *quelquechose dans le ventre*, and that we cannot say these things so well because we have not wanted so keenly to say them, just as, again, only an Englishman can really have the hump.

The word crank is ours because the thing is ours. No other people has the word because none has the real thing. This is a distinction of which we may be justly proud, though we are very modest about it and even deplore it. To be called a crank in England damns your man, whereas it should be the making of him. There is more denunciation of cranks in England than in any other country, and this is not only because there are more cranks, but also because the sane people have more aggressive bursts of sanity. The mildest persons break into such fits of fury against socialism as almost never attack persons of equivalent sanity in other countries. When the British people discovered Socialism at the General Election of 1906, its bursts of sanity were very violent. The most humane old ladies became virulent when one mentioned that one had passed through Hyde Park on a Sunday and stopped to listen at the Marble

Arch, and men who took a personal pride in the liberty of the subject cried out almost to apoplexy for some such strong arm as that of the Berlin police to put down the nuisance of unemployed processions which no other people would be "such fools as to put up with for five minutes." Yet it is precisely the sane who invented the word crank, which in itself was a beautiful tribute to the mad.

That the English sane call the mad cranks proves a sub-conscious appreciation of the latter. The sane French have never troubled to find a word for their mad, probably never considering them worth it; *fumistes, farceurs*, are fundamentally sane people who feign in various ways, either for the joke of the thing or for the very sane purpose of tricking somebody else. If a Frenchman meets a crank he can say only, *c'est un fou*. We can call him many things, can talk of fads, hobbies, axes to grind, bees in the bonnet, make up words like faddist, faddy, cranky. Besides these, *manies, lubies, idée fixe*, even a "spider in the ceiling," even *marteau, maboule, loufoque*, contain in their meaning a certain element of genial human sanity; to be *marteau* sounds to the English ear forcible, and even seems to have some kinship with crankiness. But to the Frenchman it means only a soft, pleasant, harmless dottiness; none of these French words have the definite completeness of the English words, which sound like Mr. Podsnap "brushing aside."

One meets mad countrymen in many parts of Europe. In a boat bound for Greece the Captain at dinner told us passengers we would pass near Missolonghi. "What's the show there?" asked the cultivated young Englishman. "Byron's grave." "Rot." "Byron died and was buried there. Greek War of Independence, you know, after swimming the Hellespont." "Oh! did he? There is the *Daily Mail* with the latest cricket," and he

and a pal were buried in scores, not apparently having ever heard of Byron. Over Ronceveaux pass, the diligence draws up through a swarm of goats and pigs at a small and squalid Spanish inn with a dining-room like a kitchen, and fearful bedrooms. At dinner, where I was late, Don Quixote, with straggling grey hair, pointed white beard, flying moustachios and flashing eyes, and wearing the rags of a frock coat, got up from the head of the table, bowed and greeted me in Spanish with Spanish grandeur. The next morning he was discovered to be an Englishman. When he found I was one he suddenly stopped talking, not having been introduced. Otherwise, he had become more Spanish than the Spaniards. He walked back over the pass into France, a Don Quixote with a hammer (he was a geologist and contributed to the Encyclopædia Britannica), tapping all the stones on the way as he went. In a train to Doncaster on St. Leger eve, two clean and beautiful young Guardsmen with two too-much-dressed ladies got in. One of the men began to chant, "Roll 'em up, roll 'em up, roll 'em up." Twice in two hours he cursed the War Office. The rest of the time he softly sang, "Roll 'em up," except when he dozed off for a second. He woke and sang, "Roll 'em up." Nothing else had been said by anybody to anybody when we got to Doncaster. At Toulon a British Squadron was inaugurating the *entente cordiale.* Blond young sub-lieutenants with girls' faces learned to know life in the "tolerated" houses of Toulon, and in after sports terrified swarthy, brawny, Southern sailors by the energy of their rioting. One of them left and rejoined his ship nightly by being shot out or shot in through a porthole into or from a fisherman's boat. On shore he tore up and down the town in and out of bars and brothels. Nothing went to his head, nothing cast him down, he never said anything to anybody but "mouldy."

"Good time?" "Mouldy." "Have a drink?" "Yes, Mouldy." "Fine girl?" "Mouldy." "Good ship?" "Mouldy," and he shot himself into the good ship's side from the porthole with a "Good mouldy night" from the boat in which we had gone with him alongside. The squadron sailed and he waved, shouting, "So long, old chap, had a mouldy time." I wish I could meet this son of English earth again. In Normandy at the seaside a Shropshire Vicar with thirteen daughters (two different ones came with him yearly) was engaged from some headquarters in the City of London to preach the gospel on August Sundays at the Hotel des Bains. He taught English to the boy of an amiable Frenchman, but he preferred converting the father. "God touches me," he told him slowly, articulating the words well. The amiable Frenchman had no doubt of it whatever. Every morning on the beach he told him, "God touches me," and the Frenchman always amiably acquiesced. He drove away on the top of the old coach waving to the amiable Frenchman, with whom he had left a stock of tracts. At Dijon in the hotel were a clergyman who seemed to have been flattened in the doorway and his thick, square wife, with tightly drawn thin hair. Neither ever said a word to the other. The husband twitched sometimes, and the wife looked slowly down at him, but neither ever spoke. At Dijon also in the same hotel were two old maid sisters who never went out, always read London Sixpenny Magazines, and always put on black silk dresses, showers of brown ringlets and sets of bangles for dinner. No one knows what these were doing at Dijon. No one knows what great numbers of English men and women are doing in every little corner of Europe. They worm their way everywhere, hardly a square mile of the world but some "mad Englishman" (as other people say) has done some mad thing there. They worm their way,

more adaptable rally (the general opinion to the contrary is strangely wrong) than any other peoples, yet always English still at the core. The wander-fever of us all from stockbrokers to artists is one of the touches of madness in us, and a dash of poetry too.

Many of our mad countrymen are not called cranks at all. In fact they call others cranks and themselves sane. But there is a soul of crankiness in them, and it is perhaps a touch of this that makes us all kin. The sane who talk vehemently of cranks have it; undoubtedly we who talk of our mad countrymen have it too; that we all have it makes us a great people. The mad countrymen one has met looked upon themselves as the standard of sanity; had they a suspicion of themselves they would be spoilt. They are whole and perfect because in themselves they see no gap or flaw, and they see none because it never occurs to them to look for any. While they do not pick holes in themselves they also do not place themselves: they have no idea of their own significance, they do not know what they stand for, they have never considered that they could mean anything and would be amazed to be called types. They are, indeed, only a few fragmentary and faint types out of the many which ought to be drawn completely with a firm line.

The vacuous young Englishman is an ornament of our race hitherto ill-prized. We are not as proud of him as we should be. He is worth a great deal to us because, he unites vitality with vacuity. The blanks of other peoples are blanks because with them life runs at a low ebb. He is at once full of life and empty of everything else. In him alone is found the pure vital element; in others, it runs to combinations, mixes with literature, art, politics, the complicated games of sex, the science of getting on. Only he disturbs his vitality with none of these compounds, but keeps it virgin. When life runs

strong in others it must catch on more or less to the riddles or the follies of the world. He ignores these and merely lives strongly. Literature and art obviously can secure no hold upon him ; his politics are whatever rut he was brought up to follow and are not even a sport ; the games of sex, the pleasant and intricate pastimes of intrigue, the agreeable amusements wrapped ornamentally round an instinct are played at fairly well in England, but it is not he who plays at them ; ambition, of course, is foreign to him, and he cannot know what getting on means. He does not know anything at all, he does not even know that he lives, but he does live. That he lives is the only interest he can possess for us, but it is a great one. He is probably unique among mankind in being a piece of vitality and nothing else. In every other people such vitality could not remain untouched by the world ; it would have to do or be something, to fight duels, to enlist, to scheme in politics, to capture mistresses. That is why he finds no companions in other nations ; the vacuous young Englishman, empty of everything but life, makes no foreign friends. The acquaintances abroad, whose vitality attracts him, repel him because they always betray an interest in some little corner of human activity, and he takes no interest in any. In those to whom the universe is an entire blank, as it is to him, he finds this mental state to be due to weakness and sluggish blood, and they are not alive enough for him. The former are " always rotting about something," the latter are " worms." He unites complete vacuity with fine vitality. He neither is nor does anything else. But he (Mr. Henry James would say) beautifully lives. Watch him : he travels through the same human things impervious to any, he repeats the same dozen and a half words of the day's slang, he echoes the three ideas he sucked in with his mother's milk, he treads on everybody's corns and

never knows it, he makes an ass of himself whenever he says anything at all, he is as dead to impressions as a brick wall and ought to make one ashamed of one's people, one's birth and one's upbringing—and he is charming. The vacuous young man of France or Germany or Italy is unbearable, ours has a great charm. I have watched him often, and have been delighted when he made an ass of himself, not in the least out of *Schadenfreude*, but because he did it so charmingly. Other nations also feel his charm. When you are told by a French lady (pointing out two fearful bounders of your race in a Paris café) how distinguished all Englishmen are, her mistake is merely a wrong inference ; she takes the two bounders to be replicas of the vacuous young Englishman she met, whose mental equipment was a child's compared with hers, whom she made eyes at and who is, perhaps, still wondering what she meant, but whom she found (she could not help herself) and remembers as charming. His clothes, his cleanliness, his shy freshness, his clear speech, his simple manners have all something to do with this charm of his, but they are not enough to explain it ; essentially it can come only from the fresh spring of life in him. Why does he do nothing with his vitality ? That is a mystery of the English people. Perhaps if he did he might spoil it. Let us take him as he is and rejoice in him, absurd and delightful. Our public schools and universities turn out several hundreds of him every year and an ungrateful nation pays no heed. It is one more example of our ignoring our own virtues. Our vacuous and charming young countrymen need not be encouraged to multiply infinitely, but we must take care the species never dies out. He is much better worth preserving, just like any luxury such as partridges, than our strenuous youth. The latter seldom succeeds in being as strenuous as the youth of other nations. In our young man who combines

vacuity with vitality is found a fine accident of human growth which occurs in no other nation.

Thus solid England yields cranks, some of the best. The vacuous and live young Englishman grows up into a pillar of society. He preserves the same vitality and the same blankness. Of course, neither he nor his, who are all pillars of society, are cranks at all, and they all would be offended to be called so. But calling them so is paying them (if they only knew it) the compliment of detecting the trace of poetry in them. What is interesting in the sanest English people is the tinge of madness. Their imperturbable stolidity is of the essence of dreams. They "always make up an idea of the world for themselves and pretend it is true," said a French realist. The stolid walkers through life thus turn out to be the dreamers: the more impressionable wanderers in and out of the by-paths of life are the realists, not the dreamers. The dream of the stolid is a dull one, and they do not understand it themselves, but it is what makes them interesting.

In his admirable description of one species of what I should call the genus of the crank political, Altiora Bailey, in the "New Machiavelli," Mr. Wells omits, not, I think, intentionally, to note that the species, as the genus, is exclusively indigenous to English soil. If he had noted that he would, I think, have enjoyed his description more. The boating party, drawn with three or four touches, is delicious. Altiora's whiskey and soda and lemonade dinner-parties are excellent; Altiora on sexual relations is perfect, but the novelist's hero does not enjoy describing Altiora. To take a real delight in her and others of her genus is for us a patriotic duty. When we understand that the Altioras are among the most exclusively English things in England we do not write one whit crossly about them. They exist absolutely nowhere else; had they no other they would

have, at least, that quality. What would happen to an Altiora transplanted anywhere else ? She might go on growing in American soil, but she would not flourish, for her chief flower would have withered ; she would no longer then be politically constructive. What would she be in Russia ? A bundle of nerves. In Germany ? A frump. Try to imagine her transplanted to France—try and fail. An Unified Socialist's wife, she would give nice little dinners with good wines, one or two fine liqueurs and smart talk, to show that in the historic words of her husband : " Socialists do not pretend to be ascetics," or she would be soured by piety and pray for his soul. A Socialist-Radical's wife, she would have generations of prosperous, solid bourgeoisie behind her, and know it and show it ; she would be the sheet-anchor of the ship and her fat husband the mainsail, gay in the political breezes. A Radical Permanent Under-Secretary's wife, she would either play the gay duchess, or give it up and stay at home to mind the children, dining at the restaurant with the Under-Secretary on Saturdays before an evening at the Opéra Comique or the Variétés.

The whole of Altiora, herself, her husband and her house, is solely and beautifully English, and not only she but all her genus which her creator might have described with her. The Anarchist parson, the pagan poet, the ladies who will not live a lie, are solely and beautifully English also. They drink black coffee instead of whiskey and soda. They are not politically constructive only, but philosophically critical. They look life in the face, it does not make them afraid, the lushest things of it find them ready. The damned anæmia of England fills them with fierce and riotous fury. The warm blood, the lithe limbs, the rich senses, don't they mean as much as pale policies and the dry bones of blue books ? An Anarchist parson, in a tweed suit and flannel shirt, explains that real Christianity is not bloodless, but the

most tremendous and fullest religion of the joy of living. The gargoyles of cathedrals throb with it, the gospels preach the gospel of the great faith in the flesh. Paganism was the stifling asceticism, Christianity hallows the body. The pagan poet, who eats exquisitely every day in Wardour Street French restaurants, where he reads his poems to a few over a glass of wonderful Pommard from round the corner, differs violently from the Anarchist parson, and they argue passionately for the rest of the evening. The ladies who won't live lies say with beautiful English unblushing innocence such things as the French call " enormous." They sit on the floor, curling up their long lank legs wrapped in clinging green, lay their heads on the lap of the pagan poet, a political constructor, a Socialist communist, or even the Anarchist parson, smoke cigarettes and say the enormous things. One of them, true to her principle, would not get married, because she might have had to live lies with her husband after a time, but wanted a baby by some healthy father, brains no object, as she supplied them ; having had the baby she wrote a poem about having it, printed the poem privately and sent it to her friends bound in a brown wrapper paper with gold lettering. Some old amused women with money who monopolise one or two peculiar looking young men, a white-haired prophet of a nut diet with piping voice, a musician who has discovered M. Claude Debussy, a painter who has discovered Cézanne and believes him to be of about the same age as M. Henri-Matisse, a sub-editor or two (it is Saturday night), a leader-writer who one year wrote three columns daily about Molly Maguires (or alternatively Little Loafers) make up the party ; no such other could be found outside England.

In France there are no anarchist pastors or priests : the nearest approach to the one is a Lutheran clergyman who actually plays cards (for love) on a Sunday ; to

the other, a Roman Catholic priest who was a Dreyfusard and confessed himself one under the secret of the confession. There are no ladies who do not want to live lies, except those who live truthfully at Montmartre, or assimilated places. The mistress of the periodically arrested anarchist (run in whenever a crowned head is announced in Paris) would never think of curling up by the fireplace and resting her head in the lap of a pagan poet. The pagan poet, when he still existed, had perfectly "correct" manners, flirted just to the right limit with the *jeune fille*, and made love just to the right limit to married women. The lady who has a baby by an unknown father and writes a poem about it startles even her own London a little : anarchist Paris would dismiss her instantly for a lunatic. Most of the other members of the party would be dismissed for lunatics. The French are a thousand times readier than we are to dismiss people for lunatics. They are extraordinarily sane : their journalists write journalese, and do not pretend to write anything else ; their leader-writers write leaders, and do not pretend to write anything else ; their sub-editors sub-edit, and do not pretend to think about anything else. They have not one crank to our dozen. They have next to no suffragettes, anti-vivisectionists, Fabians, political constructivists, non-conformists, revivalists, Primitive Methodists, anti-vaccinationists, Christian scientists, Salvationists, Mormons—no polygamists on religious principle, at any rate—Baptists, teetotallers ; no no-hatters, vegetarians, theosophists, unknown tongues, Boy Scouts, Primrose Leagues ; and one can't imagine them having any Smilers with short leggings, black straw helmets and banners, announcing Pillar-of-Fire Gospel Meetings.

Their first and deepest collective characteristic is their sense of reality ; the foremost characteristic in us, as a people, is our imagination. We may have many

more unimaginative individuals than they ; the average Frenchman can picture a thing to himself in everyday life ten times quicker than the average Englishman. But if we suppose that the English and French peoples are two persons, what an observer will first mark in the one will be his dreams, in the other his realism.

Thus, in the study of ourselves we should note, not ignore, cranks, because they are our imaginativeness, or a great part of it. If it came to improving ourselves, we might try to acquire a sense of reality, though hard and rare. Conversely, the French should study, not ignore, their own realism. If they wanted to teach themselves something, they might cultivate imagination, perhaps an easier thing for them than the learning of reality by us. They have already a surface imagination ; we have only a physical, no intellectual, sense of reality. We are safe realists only as long as we don't think ; and we dream the moment we begin to think.

The French think many a wild thing, but below it all lies faith in life. They can have few or no cranks, because for the real crank his dream is his life. For the Altioras, the facts of their lives exist less than their schemes. A French pagan poet could not riot in a Wardour Street restaurant. Conversely, to almost every Frenchman a good dinner always remains a good dinner. We forget life much more easily. The ladies who will not live lies, the anarchist parson, the idealist sub-editors, can easily think, in olive-green and white drawing-rooms, with two settees, a dozen cushions, and black coffee, they are tasting life to the full. To the most idealist Frenchman black coffee is black coffee, lanky or fat ladies are lanky or fat ladies, sex is sex, as a good dinner is a good dinner.

The English are sincerer towards their own consciences ; the French are sincerer towards life. The English honestly try to live their dreams, and contrive to think honestly that they are living them. The French are dishonest

towards their ideas, because, while they talk about them, they know their ideas are not realised, if realisable; but they are honest towards life, because they always remember life as a background to all the patterns dreams draw upon it. The English are dishonest towards life, because, honest dreamers, they forget life, and yet, after all, go on living.

Think of parallel cranks in France and in England, men and women. Madame Marguerite de la Tour is "advanced." She stands for freedom and "libertarism." She stands, above all, for the "idea." Whatever happens she is for *l'idé-e*, for the idea in everything. In politics she is an anarchist, because Anarchism is *the* idea, and no other political system is so much an idea. She is majestic when she denounces all other political parties because some contingency taints their idea. In art, she is for not merely liberty, but what is more, libertarism, and hails or damns a page of prose, a sonnet, a sketch, a symphonic poem, as it has or has not "the idea." In life she goes wholly by the idea; persons who live by it are noble, those who don't are filthy; this one conforms to the idea and is embraced as a friend to the cause, that other has not known how to come up to it, and is gross and contemptible. She travels about stirring up strikes for the sake of the idea, taking with her her maid, who, being her equal, always dines at table with her, and would feel much more comfortable in the kitchen. Madame Marguerite de la Tour is the daughter of a railway engineer and shareholder, and has about £300 a year of her own in railway shares, which she watches from week to week, and she makes almost £200 a year more by articles about the "idea," more or less flavoured for the public. She married at eighteen her father's Assistant Sub-chief of Department, who died. She was a widow for two years or so, then lived for two years with a literary

Anarchist, who died leaving her some Suez Canal shares, and now she thinks of marrying a well-thought-of dealer in chemical dyes, who in the interval shares her flat. She gives well-arranged little dinners, for which she markets herself in the morning, and she puts carefully together evening parties to which she asks the Railway share-owners as well as the Anarchists. She hovers between the two, solid life flirting with the idea.

Mme. Marguerite de la Tour has a son apparently twenty-five, who sleeps in her bedroom, behind a Japanese screen. She thus always knows at what time he gets to bed. Mme. Marguerite de la Tour has a wonderful figure or a wonderful corset, wonderful blond hair, almost certainly not a wig, wears wonderful clinging clothes, or a perfectly-cut tailor made when stirring up strikers. She may be fifty, she might be thirty-five. She knows how to look at a man that he may think she looks only at him, she lights up her drawing-room with her own self, and everybody there feels brilliant. The " idea " never made Madame Marguerite de la Tour forget life.

Mrs. Winifred Slaughter is first of all practical. She believes in ideas, but she believes in realising them. She is completely devoted to the cause, but the cause must be advertised. For some weeks she padlocked herself to Government Building railings. She now practices only intellectual athletics, and gives debating dinner-parties which are like prize fights. The education of one's opponents, who are opponents only because they have not been taught to think clearly, is the only royal road for the advancement of the cause, whatever the cause. Sparring, over tepid soup and an entrée tasting like sawdust. The boiled leg of mutton comes on and one adversary is knocked out. Two more go down before it is off. Over the sage pudding and gooseberry tart Mrs. Winifred Slaughter polishes off all her opponents who

were still standing up to her. A glass of tenpenny claret, Virginia cigarettes, she lights one ; " Shows my age. I'm fifty-three. In my young days we all smoked." Mrs. Winifred Slaughter is pink, fresh, clear-eyed, iron-grey haired, in purple satin ; she has muscle, flesh, bone, height, breadth, lungs, and can say more words more clearly and more coherently in less time than any one known. Some of her opponents are reviving ; she drowns them instantly and they sink with one gurgle. Words are nothing, she concludes. We must do, not talk, and we do do ; never since man was born of woman have women come to as much as now.

Mrs. Winifred Slaughter has a husband with £10,000 a year. She tells you that she gave up sexuality on entering her thirty-fifth year. Up to that age sex is excellent. She recommends it to every one ; no one should be without it. Sexuality is one of the best instruments of the cause, but sexuality must be educated, and she sketches a plan of sexual education. Mr. Slaughter has long since learned to listen without turning a hair. Ethelred Slaughter, just down from Cambridge (Mrs. W. S. knows what to take and what to leave in a Cambridge education) has not yet learned not to squirm.

Mrs. Winifred Slaughter is a more exciting and jollier person to meet than Madame Marguerite de la Tour, but Mme. Marguerite is pleasanter to dine with.

POETS

X

POETS

THE English are a nation of poets, the French a nation of *prosateurs;* there is so little prose essentially in us that we have not even a proper word for a prosateur, but must, if naming him honourably, call him a prose writer, as if one could only write in prose and not also think and be in prose, and that all our other words derived from prose become pejorative, as if one could not honourably and honestly think and be in prose, whereas the French have only "prosaique" against prosaic, prosaist, prosy, proser. The French find nothing to be ashamed of in prose, we do; why should a bore be prosy? they would ask; a boré in verse may be worse.

The English are poets without knowing it, as M. Jourdain spoke prose unawares. Some of their humblest traits have a faint poetry. English sentimentalism is the thickest in the world and does much damage, yet there is a speck of poetry in it. The callow mind that will not have real and rare sentiment, and prefers it cheap and false, does at all events want it. The tawdriest sentimentality "comes from a good nature," as the French say. It belies its own nature and defeats its own end, but we can still trace its descent. British sentimentality is in practice a worse enemy of sentiment than cynicism; it is shameless, and sentiment needs shame; it kills feelings by exposure. We, the shy among mankind, get one part of our heart printed for us upon our sleeve in long primer by novels and plays, especially plays, and never wince; some kinds of sentiment we think destined rightly to be made a motley to the view, and we

call cynics those who hide them beneath fun and prefer a "Tom Jones" joke to a cheapened feeling, we, the reserved, call—for it comes to that—restraint looseness.

Yet sentimentality *is* sentiment, though it is often hard to think so; only it is sentiment stunted for lack of intelligence, a form of sentiment very common with us. It kills sentiment more truly than cynicism can in the average mind, because unfeeling intelligence may with less difficulty learn to feel than unintelligent feeling to understand, sentiment being inseparable from feeling and understanding. But it is of the same nature as sentiment all the same. It is what makes poets of our averages; some of us might be willing to give much such poetry for some honest prose, but we must recognise it in us nevertheless and make the best of it, and the best is not quite as bad as it looks. Let us look for the soul of good in sentimentality. It is purely English to begin with. The fun is that we stare at German sentimentality for instance, because it is different from ours, though it is probably less and certainly simpler; what is the mere schwärmerei compared with our hundred different forms of make-believe? We sometimes call Russians sentimental, because many of them are capable of fanaticism, which is not quite the same thing. We have a childish habit of calling Italians and all Southerners sentimental, because they talk more loudly than we and kiss in public. I believe I have even heard it said by my countrymen that the French are sentimental, because a French father kisses his grown-up son on a railway platform. The truth is that English sentimentality cannot be beaten. It takes many different forms much subtler than those plain old ones of Christmas cards, valentines, philippines, patriotic music-hall sketches, and plays that "do not leave a nasty taste in the mouth." It shows itself in many little ways of looking at life. In a moment of insight an intelligent

Englishwoman said to me: "Only the English know how to spoon." In a moment rather of meditation an equally intelligent Frenchwoman told me: "You English always set yourselves to imagine a thing, and ever after pretend it is true." Both women were right. We have (as I have said already) a hundred ways of not looking life in the face—and that is our sentimentality. We dodge round the realities, and every sidelook we get at them we make out to be the only true and proper view which a pretty sentiment can obtain. We are convinced that whoso does look always at all life is not a nice person: we are poets. As the Frenchwoman said, we set up a dream and worship it for reality; as the Englishwoman said, only we know how to make provisional sexual pretences, and we invented flirtation. All English sentimentality is pretending, all this pretending comes from the rooted instinct of dreaming. Even the lowest forms of dreaming have some poetry; there is some poetry even in the most stupid pretending and even in the most dangerous pretending, even in the unintelligent desire of a public that flocks year after year to any plays of fancy in which the fancy makes long and violent efforts to be the right thing and always misses—even in British hypocrisy. Any sham fairy can charm the yearning British public, even more truly perhaps than our own English Ariel. British hypocrisy has often been praised on moral grounds, but it is really interesting only because it is a crude reply to the cry of a crudely poetic nature. There is evidently no moral use at all in "pretending we are better than we are," but there is a soul of pathetic idealism in the pretence. The realist, if he is intelligent and reflective, will, if anything, make himself out worse than he is; his is a much safer course than ours, but ours, with all its moral dangers, has a faint poetry not to be found in the blunt prose of sincerity.

The least intelligent French are too intelligent to be sentimental, but they can be stupidly realist as we can be stupidly sentimental. The lowest forms of British pretence they never descend to. "Pretty" plays hold the English stage for years which would be laughed off the French at the first performance; pretty fictions are kept up for generations by the English Press which French readers would not even take as good jokes from their papers; the rawest kinds of British hypocrisy the French temper is incapable of practising and cannot conceive to be worth the trouble. It sees no use or fun in foolish pretences, but its failing is to discern moreover no value in any make-believe at all. The common English mind sees hardly anything of reality and feeds chiefly on trivial dreams; the common French looks very hard only at one small corner of reality, and will not be driven out of the persuasion that that is all the world. The lowest forms of the two national characters are consistent with the highest: one people enjoys the foolish illusions of such a play as *Caste* and brought forth that Ariel among men, Shelley; the other enjoys the Palais-Royal farce that goes on shaking up the same two or three very strictly defined realities, and brought forth the most purely human of dramatists. Molière probably understood nothing inhuman; the French mind at the bottom of the scale does not understand the pleasure of pretending, even French children are not good at making believe, Frenchmen rarely ever appreciate the subtle joys of hypocrisy: nothing is less poetic than the common French mind.

The intelligent English mind, if it reflects upon itself, will usually find, perhaps sometimes with some surprise, that it does not naturally conceive intelligence without poetry. If it thinks of an intelligent man, it thinks of him as a man of various gifts, but among which there is a dash of poetry. He must have reason, insight, taste,

quick and true perceptions, a wide and strong grasp, he must see keenly and truly, and think far and right; but will the intelligent English think of him as really intelligent if with all that there is no grain of poetry in his composition? Besides what a faulty terminology calls intellectual qualities, fancy is required of him; besides reason, intuition; besides mind, some mystery. It will be found that whatever his other parts, we will not call a man intelligent if he is without a sense of mystery; the French will. To them as a rule there is nothing mystical about mind, it is an understandable, clear and precise force, probably the only one in the world that is so; to say *je pense donc je suis* is to affirm as much, and almost all intelligent Frenchmen are Cartesians. Not only will a man be quite well called intelligent by intelligent Frenchmen who has no mystery in him, but he will often be called completely intelligent; and it will not be held that there is anything essential wanting in him, even if he denies mystery and won't have it at any price. To the English intelligence such a man lacks about what he lacks who "hath no music in him"; to the French, the mystic sense may be a bloom on the mind or it may be a blight, it is not of the essence of mind, it is merely added to mind: some French thinkers will call it a pleasant ornament, others a disagreeable kink, almost none think that it alters the mind's structure, or that the mind's actual grasp of reality can be different for having it or lacking it. This is as much as to say, and indeed the French mind nearly always will say, that there is no final truth in mystery. A mind thinking thus thinks essentially in prose. Among the intelligent men of the matter-of-fact English people, there are exceedingly few who are as matter-of-fact intellectually as the majority of intelligent Frenchmen.

There is no finer intellectual machinery than that of

the French intelligence, and there are probably more really intelligent men in France than in any other country; the average intelligence in England is almost certainly lower, and the works of the intelligent English mind are seldom as well adjusted as those of the French —and this fine French mind seldom has that understanding of poetry without which an English mind will not be called intelligent. I have known several Frenchmen of extraordinary intelligence who were not poets. They had Molière's "clartés de tout" in the highest sense; no human knowledge was a shut book to them, they had at least opened every book, though too wise to say with Mallarmé (who happened not to be one of them), "et j'ai lu tous les livres"; they not only could stand up to any specialised "expert," but had thought over all the experts' heads: the whole world was theirs —except a few pages of poetry. They were, of course, as good at literature as at other arts and sciences, and the mathematicians among them wrote better than most writers among their English equals; they were artists as they were thinkers—and they were not poets. They were men for instance who could call Byron a poet and even (in extreme cases) greater than Shelley, who could deny Verlaine, or whom the childishness of Wagner would prevent from understanding his poetry. They would, praising *Othello* above all plays, be blind to *King Lear*, to the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, to *The Tempest*, admire deeply only what is human in *Macbeth*, put a fox of La Fontaine above Ariel, call the fancy that made Athene and Hermes the only true fancy because it is human, and that which made Erda and Siegfried false because inhuman. Arguing with such men, one almost thought that it is possible to be too intelligent (which is absurd) or that the mind may grow beyond the sense of mystery, which is not true. They possessed an almost complete comprehension of

almost all the world, and a total incomprehension of the rest of the world. The small corner of the world which is that rest of the world is to us much of the poetry of the world. The French intelligence is supreme up to that point; at that point it supremely fails.

The greatest Englishmen have been great poets, the greatest Frenchmen have been great prose thinkers. The French have rebelled greatly in action, we have been the greatest rebels in thought. Great, swift and irresistibly strong French deeds have realised ideas. We have been cowards at acting our thoughts, but our thoughts have dared more than ever durst those of French revolutions. The ideas of the Encyclopédistes stirred no depths; the men of the French Revolution changed the world, and they thought like children, like simple, terrific baby giants. We made timid, safe, practical political revolutions, which ran away in a panic from any ideal or general idea, but our poets went whither no French thinker ventured. The French Revolution was revolt in action such as we have never dared try, but our poetry of the beginning of the nineteenth century was, like the Elizabethan, greater revolt in thought than the French have ever dared try. Even our philosophers have been greater rebels in thought than the French revolutionists. Girondins and Jacobins would have called it blasphemy against the Goddess Reason to deny innate ideas, and after that gentle Darwin changed the world perhaps more deeply than did the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The French Revolution, called idealistic, had truly no really revolutionary ideas at all, and could only perfunctorily think, having time only to act. The immediately following success of Napoleon, the hater of ideas and "ideologists," was a brilliant perversion of an essential French national trait. There was poetry in him, not for himself to feel, for poets to find, but he was himself

the only poetry of Napoleonic France, he killed all other, all thoughts and dreams, and the French character, thus exploited, could wear with some complacence the blinkers he kept firmly harnessed on.

It is characteristic of the two peoples that the French encourages its prose thinkers to be prose thinkers, and that we do not encourage our poets to be poets. The greatest Frenchmen have been much more French than the greatest Englishmen have been English ; England's greatest men have frequently been at war with England, have left her, lived and died and been buried away from her. Very few great Frenchmen have turned their backs on France, and France has turned her back on very few of her great men : perhaps none have been called by her un-French, we have usually called ours un-English while they lived. Are we or our great men to be blamed ? Are the French or are their great men to be praised ? Some say a poet is harder to understand than a prose thinker, but I question whether, had our greatest men been prose thinkers we should have understood them any better. Indeed, what we, though dimly, understand best is poetry, not prose, which we do not understand at all. The Greeks proved that poets can be as national as prose thinkers, if not more so. Yet, although we have in us the obscure elements much more of poetry than of prose, even our national Shakespeare is far less a national English poet than Molière is a national French prose thinker. Certainly the French have a better understanding of their own qualities than we have of ours, and one may even suppose that if, having the same intelligence, they had been, as we really are, given to thinking best in poetry instead of in prose, they would have understood their poets, who would then no doubt have been their greatest men, better than we do ours. We are both the more poetic and duller people.

We should then, encourage our rebellion not our discipline, because we are better at freeing than at organising. The French, because they are better at ordering than at dreaming, should foster their reason rather than their fancy, and they do, because they know themselves much better than we know ourselves. All their thinking tends to put order into the world, because they know that to be their world's work; we do not recognise that ours is to put fancy into it. From our cranks to our poets, we misprize those who really represent us and who are really English. The French are right not to set much store by their rebels, but we should worship ours. We could not, if we tried to, be the pendulum and the measure of the world the French are, and it is vain to strengthen one's weakness, useful only to make the most of one's strength. Ours has always been to upset the balance and disturb the rules; it is, so to speak, less than superficial to talk of French unruliness and English order. In all the things that really matter at last, we have upset and the French have built, the French have realised where we dreamt. We must foster our dreams which are our strength; we must pray for more rebellion, not more discipline, for (to use bad words) more heterodoxy not more orthodoxy, for more war of creeds, not for more peace, we must wish for more fighting among ourselves, not for more unity. We can never hope to agree as the French do: let us leave unity to them. We can never hope to face life as the French do: let us leave realism to them. The English mind dreams from cricket to Shelley: let it dream, for it is best at dreaming. In English, prose is shameful; there is no such word in French as "prosy." True Englishmen in their heart of heart hold that this makes them the greater men. If they ever learnt to be as intelligent as the French, it would be the poetry in them that still would really count.

POETRY

XI

POETRY

"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree.
. . . . . .
. . . I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome, those caves of ice,
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware, beware,
His flashing eye, his floating hair.
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honeydew has fed,
And drunk the milk of paradise."

THIS we call poetry. I doubt whether we care what it means. Does it really mean much? It need mean nothing. It exists by itself; it is poetry. Whether Coleridge understood his dream—if dream he had—did he or do we care? To any mind that knows poetry when it sees it, those lines spring instantly as true and real. We feel that in them is that something which makes poetry, and could neither reason our feeling nor be reasoned out of it. The perception is immediate, and all we can say of those to whom the perception has not come is that grace has been denied them.

"Rome, l'unique objet de mon ressentiment,
Rome, à qui vient ton bras d'immoler mon amant,
Rome qui t'a vu naître et que ton cœur adore,
Rome, enfin, que je hais parcequ'elle t'honore . . ."

This, many French minds call poetry, and will tell you why. The four lines and the rest of Camille's famous cursing have fire and swing which every ear must feel. They are terse with hardly a word too much, and aptly

dramatic without a word out of the situation; they say what they mean to say, and say it with the utmost force; they have passionate eloquence. Granted the situation of "Horace" and the character of Camille, they fit the one and suit the other wholly. They have, finally, the music of words, a gorgeous organ-thunder of rhythmical words: hence they are poetry.

We feel them not to be poetry. We call them anything you like, but not poetry. We call them apt, eloquent, characteristic, dramatic, musical, and artistic. Then they are poetry, say those who call them so. They are not poetry, because they have not that which is indefinable and which is none of those things, but which makes poetry, and makes those lines of Coleridge poetry. The French literary mind that calls Camille's "Imprecations" poetry, asks what the indefinable may be, and what its use, sense, and fruits can be in art. The only answer is, we feel it.

"Kubla Khan" and the "Curses of Camille" afford, perhaps, the most violent contrast which the arbitrary choice of any two passages of verse of wholly incommensurate qualities can show. No man of poetic sense, or only of sense, would think of comparing the two. They lack the essential common measure, being the one poetry, the other verse, as between the literary standards of a mind that feels the former to be poetry, and of one that calls the latter poetry, a common measure is also wanting. The contrast serves only for a demonstration of extremes. Only an extreme form of literary judgment calls the "Curses of Camille" poetry, either because, though detecting the indefinable something which makes Coleridge's lines what they are and different, it finds those of Corneille to be none the less poetry for lacking that something; or else because, denying the indefinable, it holds that the completeness of poetry is to be found in Corneille's lines. If the judgment were

not an extreme one of the French literary mind, we should have to conclude that the latter was by temperament foreign to poetry. Verlaine would have written—

"Que ton vers soit la chose envolée
Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée
Vers d'autres cieux à d'autres amours . . ."

as an alien in French literature, and such a line as Mallarmé's—

"Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui,"

or—

"Tel qu'en lui-même enfin l'éternité le change"

would be un-French. It is obvious that these lines have the same mysterious quality as "Kubla Khan," and that the French mind that feels that quality in them, and the English mind that feels it in "Kubla Khan" are of one kin in the poetic spirit. It is equally clear that these lines are as far from the "Curses of Camille" as the latter are from the passage of Coleridge. The French mind that calls the "Curses of Camille" poetry is therefore not all the French mind.

It is an extreme type of French literary mind, yet it cannot be called an abnormal one in the land of its growth. It is not only quite sane and healthy, apart from poetry, but it flourishes usefully in other literary fields, and individual minds more or less near to the extreme type are plentiful, and a power in French literature. No study of the poetic spirit in France, though they are the negation of it, would be complete without them. Themselves hold themselves to be the essence and the base of French literature. We may have to acknowledge in the end that they are right, and that French literature is essentially and fundamentally prosaic; that the poetic spirit in it is a beautiful accident, a splendid ornament, not a part of the substance or the necessary framework of the building; that French literature, shorn of its poetry, would not

topple and melt away, whereas England, if she had not had her poets, would perhaps have missed her world's work in letters. Anyhow, it is a unique peculiarity of French literature that the study of its poetry must first take into account that of its poetry which is not poetry. In the English language hardly any merely versified work is of the slightest importance to the student, and that of the poet is sufficient unto itself. In French literature the study of the poetic spirit must begin with the study of the French literary spirit that calls the "Curses of Camille" poetry.

No one in England calls Pope's

> "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
> The proper study of mankind is man,"

poetry; in France, it is quite conceivable that the second line, if it had been written in French, might be called "un beau vers." To fit the French definition of Un beau vers a line need not be poetry at all, and it need have neither beauty nor the music of words; in fact, to fit perfectly the definition familiar to that extreme type of French literary mind it must not have either mysterious beauty or the pure music of words. Innumerable examples run through the memory of all who have read French verse.

> "'Que vouliez vous qu'il fît contre trois?' 'Qu'il mourût'"
> "Cinna, tu le savais et veux m'assassiner."
> "'Albe vous a choisi je ne vous connais plus.'
> 'Je vous connais encore'" . . . (The rest is padding.)
> "Je rends grâces au ciel de n'être pas Romain,
> Pour conserver encore quelquechose d'humain."
> "Sors vainqueur d'un combat dont Chimène est le prix."
> "Cette obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles."

or to go to Racine after Corneille:

> "Ce n'est plus une ardeur en mes veines cachée
> C'est Venus tout entière à sa proie attachée."
> "Je l'aime, je le fuis; Titus m'aime, il me quitte."
> "Comment en un plomb vil l'or pur s'est il changé?"

or to go, after Racine, to Victor Hugo :

"L'ombre était nuptiale, auguste et solennelle."
"L'œil était dans la tombe et regardait Caïn."
"Car Dieu, de l'araignée, avait fait le soleil."
"Donne lui tout de même à boire, dit mon père."

These all fit the definition of Un beau vers or two. They have neither beauty nor the music of words : they are not poetry. They have an interest of their own ; they are terse, dramatic and epigrammatic, and perhaps a definition for English minds of Un beau vers in French might be a versified dramatic epigram. When the father of the Horatii, asked what his son should have done, answers, " he should have died," the whole spirit of the drama, conventional or not, but the spirit that was intended to be conveyed is expressed in the fewest words that could have been found. Augustus has retold to Cinna all that he has done for Cinna, and that Cinna knows ; he turns upon Cinna with, " Thou knowest, and wilt murder me." The one thing Cinna did not know was that Augustus knew Cinna meant to murder him. No one line could have summed up a good theatrical situation better.

All these beaux vers are excellently dramatic epigrams, but they are not poetry. Why are such lines as " After life's fitful fever he sleeps well " and " All our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death " poetry ? These in relation to the dramatic situation are apt, terse, and simple like any beau vers. Corneille could not have written either with fewer ornaments or with more direct and forcible sense. But they are not beaux vers, they are poetry ; between those and these a whole world lies, a partly inexplicable world. What is the essential difference between " ' Que vouliez vous qu'il fît contre trois ? ' ' Quil mourût ' " and " After life's fitful fever he sleeps well " ? The former is superbly heroic, the latter is tragic, and what else ? That it

makes us ask, what else? is its secret. The line of Corneille is dramatic, heroic, and mangificent, and there it stops; it is finished and complete, it lasts no more than it lasts, it is done when it is done, it has no echoes, it sounds no harmonics and throws no feelers. It is un beau vers, and when the beau vers is over—it is over, rounded off and punctuated with a full stop. But "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well," definite and final as the actual phrase is, sends waves through the mind that do not stop. By the power of its words it calls up images which are not limited. That it should be Macbeth who speaks of life's fitful fever, that he should speak of sleeping well, that the man who sleeps well should be the King he murdered asleep, is essential tragedy. But while there is that in those seven words, there is more, and it is the more that makes them poetry. The actual sound of the words has its own magic, and the sound is inseparable from the sense. The two are bound inexplicably with one another, and to point to the alliteration, the four f's and the v and the twelve s's, to the sudden adagio of the soft long-drawn vowels of "he" and "sleeps" after the staccato of the preceding syllables, the sudden pianissimo staccato close of the "well," full of Macbeth's desperate longing in his moment of weakness for that sleep, would be no more, if no less, an explanation, than it was to point to the tragedy which the meaning of the words derive from the dramatic situation. The whole is a mystery as all poetry is. The beau vers is no mystery.

Verlaine wrote:

"Et pour sa voix, lointaine et calme et grave,
Elle a l'inflexion des voix chères qui se sont tues."

Compare this with:

"Les Maures en fuyant ont emporté son crime"

(or any other historic beau vers at will, for in the estimation of the poetic quality questions of meaning,

of context, of style, of genre, are undoubtedly secondary, and wonder how the same mind can call the two poetry. Such a mind is the greatest problem of French literary psychology. The mind that calls Corneille's line poetry and those of Verlaine not, or inferior, is easy to understand; it is one that knows what poetry is about as well as Théophile Gautier knew what music is, which he called noise. A peculiarity of the French is that such minds with "wisdom at one entrance quite shut out" may exist intelligently and usefully in their literature, may think acutely and do good work in other fields, may be valuable creators as well as critics, may write perfect prose, and even poetic prose, the quality of which, of course, has nothing to do with the poetic spirit, and may possibly be its contradictory. More, they often persist in writing in verse, and do it exceedingly well, putting into it all sorts of qualities except poetry. Boileau had great good sense, judgment, and literary acumen, and had he only cured himself of his unholy passion for writing in verse, might in prose have been an excellent critic; as a "poet" he is a warning to every versifier. It is probably impossible for a writer to have less poetry in his composition than he had. The opening lines of his Art Poétique (still learnt by heart in French Public Schools to this day in the "Rhetoric" class) are very likely the most remarkable monument of pompous platitude and blundering, commonplace, and nonsensical simile extant in any language:

> "C'est en vain qu'au Parnasse un téméraire auteur
> Pense de l'art des vers atteindre la hauteur,
> S'il ne sent point du ciel l'influence secrète,
> Si son astre en naissant ne l'a formé poète,
> Pour lui Phébus est sourd et Pégase est rétif."

Lines of his remain as classics:

> "Vingt fois sur le métier remettez vottre ouvrage"

or,

> "Qui ne sut se borner ne sut jamais ecrire,"

To judge the mind to which these two lines, the latter, at all events, of which has the value of a good, honest, pertinently put axiom, are poetry, is plain sailing. To such a mind poetry means verse, and verse is a vehicle, which may at will be employed for conveying exactly the same thoughts as can be conveyed in prose, and the use of which under certain circumstances may be recommended to give greater point to the expression of those thoughts. No literature, except perhaps the Latin, has produced such admirable prose writers in verse as the French. The prince of them all is Molière, the unequalled.

"'Qu'est ce donc? Qu'avez vous?' 'Laissez moi, je vous prie?
'Mais encor dites moi quelle bizarrerie . . .'
'Laissez moi là, vous dis-je et courez vous cacher.'
'Mais on entend les gens au moins sans se fâcher.'
'Moi je veux me fâcher et ne veux point entendre.'"

Was ever such real talk put into such easy verse? Such perfect work is unknown in the English language. There is, of course, no atom of poetry in the "Misanthrope," or in any of Molière's verse plays, not even in "Amphitryon," with its delicious lines like "Le Seigneur Jupiter sait dorer la pilule." The only atom of poetry in Molière is at the end of that prose comedy of his which becomes a tragedy, "Don Juan." Molière is the proof of the theory of those who do not know what poetry is, of those extreme French literary minds, of the so-called classicists. Here, they say, is the greatest of poets; this is poetry, there is no other, or, at least, no other equal to it; the plane of other poetries is lower; this is the human, therefore the perfect poetry. The standpoint is not absurd; the world at one entrance is quite shut out, but within that limited horizon, closed to the infinite spaces of poetry, opening on no foam of perilous seas, taste is delicate, art refined, judgment sound, and the intelligence of human things is keen and deep.

The real problem is that of the mind which accepts both those two lines of Verlaine and that one of Corneille (for example) as poetry. The extreme attitude is growing rare, even the French Academy does, or at least some Academicians do, distinguish now between poetry and verse, and hold no longer that all well-written verse is poetry. The eclectic view is common and indeed general. Verlaine himself said once that his three favourite poets were La Fontaine, Racine, and (perhaps with a touch of perversity) Boileau. Few French men of letters will be found to reject Corneille (to go on with the same example) once for all as a poet, remembering him only as perhaps the greatest of heroic orators, and few men of literary sensibility can remain deaf to Verlaine. Yet to class both as poets is an altogether incomprehensible literary method. If you do so, let there then at least be two kinds of poetry, one of which we will call not poetry. To give the same name to things more different than any other two in that or in any other art is the strangest of errors.

The literary faith of the man who puts Victor Hugo, as poet, and Verlaine together, and Victor Hugo above Verlaine, is unfathomable. Victor Hugo was the most amazing example of a mind which had instinctive poetry in it, and in which that instinctive poetry was well-nigh ruined by total intellectual inability to judge reflectively what poetry is. His poetry rarely escapes being swamped by his fatal gift of eloquence ("take eloquence and wring its neck," said Verlaine), but his inability to stem the flood of that eloquence when it threatened to drown what instinctive poetry there was in him came from his incapacity to know poetry with his judgment when he saw it, and even when he himself produced it with his feeling. The inability of a man to recognise poetry even when he writes it himself is remarkable, but it is not unique, and is only another proof that poetry is a

mysterious thing. Victor Hugo is an example of the unfathomable ways of the poetic spirit. Here and there he wrote a line better than he knew. The rest is a terrific eloquence, more enormous than any literature of any country has ever brought forth. The "Légende des Siècles" is astounding reading. The abundance of it, the picturesqueness, the "working up," the journalistic sense, if not of the real, of the plausible, the quick appreciation of the thing and the aspect of a thing that will directly appeal to the popular imagination, the ability to see at once what high lights in a picture will catch every eye, and to throw them up in their best value, the talent with which vignettes of history, the history of amiable romance, are picked out and redrawn with ease and dash, the overwhelming facility with which the whole panorama is hurled, yet with a modicum of finished detail, upon the canvas, are amazing. It is not less astonishing to consider how few pen'orths of poetry we have for all this prodigious quantity of picturesqueness.

The criticism of literature that, while not denying the divinity of Verlaine, accepts Victor Hugo as the Jove of the French Olympus in the Nineteenth Century, and which accepts him thus, not crudely with the simplicity of popular opinion, fascinated by the figure of the Grand Old Man of French poetry, but deliberately and maturely, finally and repentantly, after a time of infidelity, now recanted, to his religion, is more difficult to understand than the literary judgment that calls Boileau a didactic poet and Corneille a dramatic poet. Take the slightest, the shadowiest lines of Verlaine:

Dame souris trotte,
Noire dans le gris du soir.
Dame souris trotte
Grise dans le noir.

On sonne la cloche,
Dormez les bons prisonniers.
On sonne la cloche,
Faut que vous dormiez.

Pas de mauvais rève,
Ne pensez qu'à vos amours . . .
. . . .
Un nuage passe,
Il fait noir comme en un four,
Un nuage passe.

Tiens, le petit jour!
Dame souris trotte,
Rose dans les rayons bleus.
Dame souris trotte.
Debout, paresseux!

Is there any poetry such as even these mere floating, gossamer threads in more than three or four poets in the world, let alone Victor Hugo? One cannot handle it, one can hardly touch it without breaking it. It shines like webs with the dew on them at sunrise. Nothing was ever so slight and slender and apparently so simple, yet so penetrating. The words by themselves seem nothing, and they seem put together without art. They might have dropped into their places naturally, and have been spoken off as they stand written. As they stand there is magic in them. They are almost nothing, but how much they call up: the prison dormitory or the hospital ward which might be the world itself, the extraordinary quiet, the noiseless mouse, the wide open eyes of the one sleepless man watching her, the wonderful tenderness of it all, the sweet humanity of the soft "dormez les bons prisonniers," and the tiny touch of tragic pity of the "Faut que vous dormiez"; the suddenly new picture in "Tiens, le petit jour," the mouse that had pattered "Grise dans le noir" through the night, now "Rose dans les rayons bleus"; the abrupt joy and courage of "Debout, paresseux." Was

ever poetry truer than this "Impression fausse?" Will ever any poet tell us how such things are done, and can he ever tell us even when he has himself done them? We cannot even, except vaguely, make out why the thing is so perfect and can only feel it. The dread in those other lines of Verlaine is a piece of the same mystery. No such echoing knell was ever rung before.

Un grand sommeil noir
Tombe sur ma vie:
Dormez, tout espoir,
Dormez, toute envie.

We feel now (as one always does), that we might have written those mere words, in which is a so simply put and final lament, that the words were always meant to be put together so one day, and that those four short lines say what had been waiting to be thus said.

Je suis un berceau
Qu'une main balance
Au creux d'un caveau.

Was ever so much misery put into thirteen words? Then the end: "Silence, silence,"—"the very word is like a bell"; the word has taken on a new depth since Verlaine wrote it there. It was not a particularly good or expressive word before, the very sound of it seems changed from what we have remembered it. It is the same magic as Keats played with that other as hackneyed word "forlorn," or as Meredith made out of three humblest words: "And we dropped like the fruits of the tree, Even we, Even so."

Of the man who makes such magic Coleridge said—

Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

One is driven to conclude that the French literary mind which weighs Victor Hugo and Verlaine in the

same balance must be essentially impervious to such magic. To those upon whom that command of Coleridge is imperative it is a question not of degree, but of kind. The words of poetry cease to be the same as those of eloquence, picturesqueness, heroism, sublimity, art, in verse ; that and these are not made of the same stuff, and the latter, magnified infinitely, will never be the former. It may be that because there were fewer such magicians in French verse than in English, the judgment long accustomed to admirably written verse which is not poetry ends by mistaking it for poetry. Yet French literature has produced, if few, at all events great magicians, and it is almost inconceivable that a keen intelligence should not feel by instinct that almost nothing Victor Hugo versified (to take as an example once more the most monumental miscarriage of rhythmical language in any literature) is of the same nature as what they sang.

Perhaps the real problem of the French mind, not of that easily placed French mind which calls the " Curses of Camille " higher poetry than " Impression Fausse," but of that more difficult to understand which truly feels the latter to be poetry, but also honestly calls the former poetry, is whether it ever has had the concept of poetry as of a thing in itself and has ever given it a place radically apart in literature ; whether it has ever accepted that poetry should be cut off from reason and should be a reason unto itself, that poetry should not essentially be human, but might try to be superhuman, were it inhuman in the attempt.

The Frenchman is hardly to be found who does not place *Othello* far above *King Lear*, a *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest ;* it is generally preferred of all the purely human Shakesperean dramas, it is almost invariably held to be greater than those that are not solely human, that are more—or less—than human.

King Lear is rarely understood: the absurdity of the plot, the cheerful acceptance of the starting-point of the old story and of all the ancient accumulation of complicated and useless intrigue and slaughter, the heedlessness of the master of dramatic psychology in taking not the least pains to paint Regan and Goneril whose speeches, sentiments, and actions are completely interchangeable, and in spending but little even upon Cordelia, all this, which when we read the play we brush aside, seems to remain a stumbling-block to French brains. To stick at such a hedge appears to us a little foolish; they are in the main honestly incapable of clearing it. How could the dramatist who drew the blackest, yet most real villain of any stage, Iago, have outlined Lear's two elder daughters with so slovenly a hand? How could the master builder of such dramatic preparation as that of Iago's plot have allowed the clumsy jumble of incidents in *King Lear* to stand? The comparison with *Othello* seems to us useless; it is not to minds fed on purely human poetry. They look for psychology in the painting of Regan and Goneril, and for humanity even in the bare story of the play. To them it seems irrational that the poet should have cared as little as we do for the incidents of his plot. They honestly regret that *King Lear* should not be a good play, and believe that if it were it would be a greater tragedy, because good workmanship never spoilt one. They have no sympathy with the point of view which is ours, and which was the poet's, that the play in this case is nothing and the poetry everything. Can there be the greatest poetry without perfection of human psychology? If Regan and Goneril were as well drawn as Iago, would not the tragedy have greater poetry? To them the saving grace of poetry does not seem as omnipotent as it does to us. We feel the poetry of *King Lear* to be so great that we would hardly wish

for the story to be less crude ; we almost feel that the poet brushed it in with a wilfully clumsy hand in order that nothing should exist there but the poetry which he felt. We have not the same hunger for finish as the French mind (an emancipation which we have little cause to boast about), and things which grate upon it so harshly as to distract it may be passed over by us with equanimity. We should feel no pride in that peace of mind except in very rare cases such as that of *King Lear*. There we may call ourselves lucky that we are able to yield completely to poetry, and we pity a mind which does not conceive that the poetry may be greater perhaps because the psychology is less, or that the poetry is so great that nothing else matters. We might like a more plausible Regan, and a Goneril a little different in villainy from her sister, or could do without all the stabbing and treacherous letters. But what does it all weigh in the balance with Lear in the storm, with " 'Gainst a head so old and white as this," in which surely a purer sense, as Mallarmé said, has been given to two " Words of the herd," old and white ?

The whole question then is whether the French mind realises that poetry is a star and dwells apart. I have often thought that *King Lear* is a crucial test to be applied to doubtful cases. M. Maurice Maeterlinck has written one of the finest appreciations of *King Lear* extant, but he is not a Frenchman, and what is more he is un-French. To the average cultured literary French mind, the poetry of Lear in the storm, of Lear mad and understanding at last what he never understood sane and reigning, of Lear sane again and helpless (pray do not mock me), finally mad once more but with what a different madness (" should a dog, a cat, a mouse, have life ? ") is not so great that the weaknesses of dramatic construction and delineation in the play can be overcome : therein perhaps is told the whole

problem of the French literary attitude towards poetry.

Poetry is looked upon by the French intelligence, I think, almost always to some extent as a handmaiden, not as her own mistress; she does not solely rule, she serves also. She may not lead reason whither she will, reason must have a consulting voice. She is not a law and an end unto herself, but her law is one among other laws, and there are other ends to aim at besides her own. The beauty of poetry is to be sought, but not solely and intolerantly, and not at the expense of other human aspirations; or rather the greatest beauty of poetry cannot be attained unless other aims are sought with it, and the highest poetry is not the poetry that is an end unto herself. The classical French mind undoubtedly holds that the greatest poetry must be the most human; almost no French mind accepts that the greatest poetry may be the most inhuman. Perhaps to the English mind, on the contrary, the greatest poetry precisely is the least human, but whether that be the final English judgment or not, it is undoubtedly foreign to the French intelligence.

The French mind does not want poetry to take it anywhere out of the world. Though human as well as unearthly, the poetry of *King Lear* is not enough in a French judgment to compensate the crudeness of the human story. The unearthly poetry of *Macbeth* captures French minds by what there is of human meaning in it, not by its unearthliness, and the poetry of *The Tempest* and of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, is inferior because less human. Any Englishman who has met Frenchmen eagerly interested in literature will remember having often argued such points with them. "The introduction of supernatural agencies into the story of *Macbeth*, or rather the acceptance by the poet of the supernatural agencies which he found already

crudely mixed with the old tale, is supremely felicitous. To his wonderful handling of those agencies the tragedy owes half its sublimity. That none perceive more clearly than we (say the poet's French worshippers, who yield to none in their admiration of certain aspects of his genius). *Macbeth* without the witches would be shorn of half its poetic greatness ; the tragedy would remain great, but it would be a pedestrian tragedy. The symbol of the witches gives it its wings. The play attains to the highest poetry, because while the earthly tragedy is admirable, unearthly symbols are woven into it, which are of the essence of sublimity. The symbol is sublime because it is one with the tragedy. The witches by themselves have dreadful grandeur, but their essential grandeur lies in their sway over human actions. They are bubbles of the earth but they have an awful power over the earth. The fates, which are man's own instincts and will and weaknesses, have never been symbolised with equal splendour and terror. The Graiae fade away by the side of Shakespeare's witches. The imagination that drew the latter had had close and startling visions of the world's mysteries. The shadow thrown by these more terribly living fates over men's actions gives the tragedy its poetry. The witches are great poetry because their witchcraft rules human evil." Observe that, if the tragedy be greater by poetic mystery, the mystery is great poetry because it involves human action ; the witches give the play of *Macbeth* poetry, but they are poetic because they hover round the man Macbeth. The unearthly symbol is poetic, but it is great poetry precisely because it is a symbol of earthly reality. Would the unearthly be as great poetry, were it a sign only of itself ? The French answer is, no. The unearthly standing by itself is a dream ; a dream can never be as great poetry as reality. Listen to the comparison between *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* : " The symbols of *Macbeth*

are terrible, because of their meaning. The supernatural agencies of *The Tempest* are in themselves poetic, but do not reach the same height of poetry, because they melt into thin air, and what is left of them ? No doubt our fancy can read meanings into them, but the point is that it must be our fancy that reads of set purpose and may read different meanings at will. The symbol does not force itself irresistibly on the mind, with the inevitableness of the greatest symbols. The witches in *Macbeth* command us as imperiously as a force of nature, they leave us no space for curious questions and the play of fancy. With Setebos, Caliban, Ariel, our fancy plays and must play : they do not rule, but serve our imagination ; they are such stuff as dreams are made on, and the poet's purpose was that they should set us free to dream. Who has ever had the time to dream during *Macbeth ?* The reason is that the symbols of *Macbeth* are the direct signs of reality, a violent overwhelming reality, and that those of *The Tempest* are the signs only of a dream : a dream can never be as great as reality. We can, as well as any, rejoice and shudder at Caliban, smile impishly at Puck, and wistfully at Ariel. But we cannot put them among the greatest figments of poetry, because they are not of our earth. To us our earth is the most interesting planet in the universe. Caliban is inhuman. Puck is amused to be inhuman. Ariel rejoices in being inhuman. They are wonderful, often beautiful fancies ; they are not true symbols. The witches of *Macbeth* are among the most awful symbols which a poet ever created for mankind ; mankind is kept at arm's length by the imagination of *The Tempest.* The greatest poetry need not, perhaps, be the most human, but the greatest poetry cannot be inhuman." Note the implication that it is poverty not wealth in a symbol to be such that fancy can read many meanings at will into it. The immediate and

imperative symbol is the richer ; hence the supernatural in *Macbeth* is deeper than that of *The Tempest*. This is as much as to posit that mystery for its own sake is not highly valuable, and I think the French intellect in general would accept that premiss. Mystery does not command but doubly serves ; it is an instrument of poetry which herself is not her own mistress. To our instinct, on the contrary, Ariel is more wonderful than the witches in *Macbeth*. Ariel is a richer symbol precisely because the symbol has wings to carry us away from the earth. The witches serve the tragedy, Ariel flies beyond the story of Prospero and is greater than Prospero himself, Ariel's master. Ariel to us is more wonderful precisely because he is calmly unearthly. He is not of our earth, but belongs, more completely perhaps than any other creation of any other poet, to "fairylands forlorn." There is something in Ariel which seems to be the very poetic spirit of English thought, because in the primitive nursery rhyme-like words he sings, there is the mystery of other worlds than ours, and an unsaid immortal longing. None of us who feels poetry has ever read the parting of Ariel from Prospero without the strangest pang, and Ariel, ungrateful, unfeeling, untender, glad only of one thing, that he is free in the air at last again, Ariel utterly inhuman, leaving the man Prospero who regrets and loves because he is a man, Ariel loving nothing but air and freedom, Ariel the unearthliest creation of poetry, is to us one of the most direct visions a poet ever had of the pure spirit of poetry. The mind trained upon French literary traditions cannot understand Ariel. I do not say that all French minds are so trained. But I believe that nine in ten of them will call Prospero the poet, because he is a man with man's feelings, and Ariel a fancy, and will say that Prospero lives, while Ariel dies, after the play is over. We know, and Prospero

himself well knows, that Prospero turns to dust when the dream fades and the curtain falls, but that Ariel is immortal.

Molière could not have been English, and Shelley could not have been French. The two, so utterly unlike, may be taken as typical of their national literatures, not in a general, but in one particular sense. Shelley is probably the most perfect example of the pure poet that any literature has ever produced. He is all made of poetry. His life to him can never really have been aught but a dream, his poetry was the reality. He may or may not himself have understood that it was so; probably he did deeply at times, perhaps often, understand himself, and at other times, perhaps more seldom than we suppose, he whipped himself into the belief that life mattered to him, that his own loves and affections mattered, and that the fates of other men, their wrongs and their struggles, moved him, whipped himself, in fact, into living. But at heart he must have often felt that "icy ecstasy" which, in the admirably exact expression of Mr. Arthur Symons, was the real enthusiasm that filled him and which was the pure spirit of poetry. At heart he was utterly inhuman, at heart he was Ariel. It was Byron, the aristocrat, the egoist, the jouisseur, the poseur (the poseur, though, who died at Missolonghi), who was human, and it was inhuman Shelley who was the democrat and the revolutionist. Shelley was nothing but a poet, could write nothing but poetry, could write meaningless, empty words, but not words which were not poetry; he was in culture the accomplished man of letters, in temperament the perfect poet. English literature has produced the complete type of the pure poet, and Shelley is national in the sense—not that, far from it indeed, he represents a national aspiration—but that all English poetry aims consciously or unconsciously at that ideal of pure,

unearthly, inhuman poetry. He is the most perfect expression of the poetic spirit in English literature. In French literature, the poetic spirit does not aim at Shelley.

It does not of course aim solely, but I think it aims mainly, at Molière. Molière is the most human dramatist, Molière is the perfect human dramatist. Shelley is the pattern of the pure poet, Molière is the model of human playwrights. No one would rationally think of comparing Molière and Shelley with one another, yet the two are national in the sense that all English poets remember more or less Shelley in their dreams, and that all French poets remember more or less Molière in their judgment. Shelley is an ideal for English poetry, Molière a touchstone for French poetry. The English poet says, "I may soar as high as Shelley"; the French poet tells himself, "Whithersoever I soar, let me not lose touch with the humanity of Molière." The one leads on, the other steadies; the one gives wings, the other gives the sense of reality. We have to acknowledge that the most human of dramatists could not have been English. Almost no English writer has the spirit of Molière, and none has his form. He is the supreme human dramatist, who satirises without extravagance, moralises without preaching, has humour, but not fancy, draws characters, but does not imagine them, lives marvellously in the world, but never out of it, has humanity, psychological insight, humour, philosophy, a strong wit to back his philosophy, and has not poetry. He writes a language that for directness and aptness has never been equalled, verse which with equally astounding ease fits sharp satire, caricature, philosophising, mere gorgeous fun, small talk, conversation which would be difficult enough to photograph into prose and which it renders exactly without the suspicion of an effort. He writes the most consummate verse ever written, but not poetry. His verse has never been approached in English. No literary

instrument like it exists, so flexible, strong, unobtrusive, complete, and sufficient. Célimène, Alceste, Chrysale, Clitandre, Henriette, Tartufe—even Dorine—speak verse, as M. Jourdain spoke prose. Every line they say is their natural speech, and every word is there because they meant to say it, not because the Alexandrine line required it. Alceste can row Célimène, Célimène's courtiers can tear reputations to pieces, Tartufe can preach and Elvire show him up, Chrysale can lay down the axioms of the bourgeois, Henriette can talk homely common sense, her sisters glorious nonsense, Clitandre courtly good sense, and the stiff, unmanageable, unbending Alexandrine line fits it all with the same accomplished ease, and without the strain of half a line. Even in French, Molière's miraculous verse has never been equalled. His spirit lives in a hundred characters which are as real to-day as when he drew them. Their like can be found neither in the English drama nor in the English novel. The former has produced no such definitely, neatly, and solely human characters; the latter contains none so broadly and typically human. The English novel, at its greatest, has created no such universally human characters; the greatest characters of the English drama are not so definitely human: there is something more than human in them.

The hackneyed instance of the French inability to understand English poetry, the overrating of Byron, is also a useful indication of the French attitude towards all poetry. Few French minds—even those that understand their own real poetry most truly—do not rank Byron above, and almost none rank him below, Shelley and Keats. The last two have many true lovers in France, who admire them even translated, which seems almost a perversion of worship to the Englishman; but even such Frenchmen are taken in by the eloquence of "Childe Harold," and call "Manfred" a great true

poem. The judgment, obviously right to the English mind, that Byron seldom wrote real poetry at all, and never of the greatest, is actually still put down by many French lovers of English literature to inherited early nineteenth-century English hypocrisy. It would be unfair to judge a mind's ability to understand poetry by its appreciation of poetry in a foreign language, however well the language be understood, still less in a translation; but Byron's lasting and real appeal to the French mind—even to that which understands Shelley as well as Verlaine—is all the same significant.

The general English inability to understand Racine is perhaps equally meaning. We are true lovers of Molière. We cannot call him a poet, but we call him everything else. And we do not call him a poet for the plain reason that, whatever the French mind may think, he is not a poet. We do not love Racine—in fact, there is no doubt he bores us. We not only never called him a poet, but we do not honestly think him a dramatist. Yet, whatever else there be in him as well, there is some poetry in him—little of it and not of the greatest, yet real. Not one in a hundred English readers has discovered it, but it is there. Probably the way for the English mind to understand what is solely French in the French attitude towards poetry is to learn to find the poetry of Racine. There is little of it. The French ear and intelligence often mistake for real poetry in Racine what is merely his harmonious numbers and delicately true imagination. But he has sometimes more than these. There are sometimes echoes to his usually closed thought; his usually neat music sometimes throws out thoughts beyond itself. He is a man not without mystery. The three lines—

> Dieux, que ne suis-je assise à l'ombre des forêts,
> Que ne puis-je au milieu d'une noble poussière,
> Suivre de loin un char courant dans la carrière

are real poetry. Of the four lines—

> J'ai voulu, devant vous exposant mes remords,
> Par un chemin plus lent descendre chez les morts.
> J'ai pris, j'ai fait couler dans mes brûlantes veines,
> Un poison que Médée apporta dans Athènes.

the first is good padding, the third is good eloquence, the second and fourth are real poetry, not of the greatest, but real. The second might be compared with "After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well," though it is inferior, containing less. Both these lines of Racine have some mysterious echoes which the English mind and ear will hear if they be sufficiently trained to the order and measure of sound and thought which the French poetic spirit puts even into its mysteries. Racine is the touch-stone by which an understanding of French poetry can be tested, and which will reveal whether the two kinds of French poetry are understood, firstly that which is poetry to the French mind and not to ours, and secondly that which, while akin closely to the former, yet is undoubtedly real poetry. The first is neat and subtle psychology in artistic verse, the second is almost the same thought and the same verse, with mystery, were it but one speck of mystery, added. To the English mind that understands poetry at all there is a difference of kind between the two; there is not to many French minds which understand their own poetry quite well. On this score our quarrel with such French minds will last, and we could almost argue that we understand their poetry better than they, since we feel a world of difference where they feel only a shade. But we must learn also to understand what they call poetry and what we do not; it is not poetry, but it has every other quality of art, and no artist in such-like art has excelled Racine. In the rare moments when he leaps suddenly to what we call and what alone is real poetry, he remains still the conscious, perfect artist: more accurately, he

gets out of conscious art for one instant and is back into it again. Racine thus is a better touchstone to test our understanding of French poetry than Verlaine, for instance, who is nearer to us. The real poetry in both has the same mysterious quality :

Par un chemin plus lent descendre chez les morts,

is some such

. . . chose envolée
Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée
Vers d'autres vieux à d'autres amours.

But even the real poetry of Racine has kinships which Verlaine's has not with that other French poetry which is everything that is agreeable, but not poetry. Thus, for testing the French mind's appreciation of its own real poetry, the better touchstone, on the contrary, is Verlaine. Racine is much nearer to the French mind, at least the French mind since the Renaissance, than Verlaine.

The whole quarrel between us and the French comes to this, that we cannot understand poetry without mystery, and that they can ; not only they recognise a poetry of human reason which we call no poetry at all, but the classical, perhaps the normal, French mind puts it above the poetry of mystery which we call the only real poetry. Among their own poets Baudelaire is commonly put above Verlaine because although

Le poète est semblable au prince des nuées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher,

he is not less sure-footed because of his wings : Verlaine either flew or hobbled. We should say that when Baudelaire had mystery he equalled Verlaine, and that

O mon enfant, ma sœur,
Songe à la douceur. . . .

or,

Nous aurons des lits pleins d'odeurs legères,

are such words that having heard them

> . . . notre âme depuis ce temps tremble et s'étonne.

whereas

> Les amants des prostituées
> Sont heureux, dispos et repus,

or,

> Lorsque par un décret des puissances suprémes,
> Le poète apparait en ce monde ennuyé. . . .

are wonderful, but not magic words.

The English mind should be taught to understand the particular qualities of the French poetry which we rightly do not call poetry. No advice can be given to that French mind which does not understand the poetry of mystery, for mystery cannot be taught. Any English mind that understands poetry at all has, therefore, the advantage of such French minds; it has something to learn, they can learn nothing.

France has brought forth some real poetry, and much perfect verse, England much more real poetry and almost no perfect verse. Since the Renaissance real poetry has been a beautiful accident in French literature. After the ghastly blunder of French romanticism, French literature in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the symbolist movement aimed more at real poetry and less at perfect verse than it had since the Renaissance, but it scored not very many hits for a prodigious number of shots. Having given up writing perfect verse the French poet was a poet à la Whitman, and for one line of real poetry, wrote ten flabby lines of not even verse. Even M. Emile Verhaeren, when he is not a great poet, is less than a versifier. A Théophile Gautier (who as a versifier was not of course a romantique at all) never writes real poetry, but almost never writes an imperfect line of verse. Was the French mind after all right to aim after the Renaissance at perfect verse, not real poetry?

Real poetry is more natural to the English than to the French language. Ingenious verse which would but pass muster in France ranks high in England, the standard of mere handicraft is much higher in the former than in the latter language. There is no teaching real poetry, but English workmanship would bear much improving. This is only saying that the English are the poets, and the French the prose writers of the world's literature. Poetry is high and seldom reached ; the art of prose, in verse as well as in prose, is lower, but the French have often reached its summit.

PROSE

XII

PROSE

THE differences between English and French prose would be worth studying. We might find in them a reflection of differences between the national characters. May it not be first of all characteristic of the two peoples that the English has been better at poetry, and the French better at prose? That the former has sung and the latter talked best?

The bad prose of the two peoples is perhaps as characteristic of them as their good. The French and the English have different ways of writing badly. Indeed the lesser vices of one language are sometimes almost the virtues of the other. The greater are common to the two, but the worst of one are never the worst of the other. The worst French style is the "écriture artiste," the worst English is well-oiled eloquence. The former is not as bad in English, the latter not as bad in French. French "artist-writing" is florid and pretentious, but it is more than that; it apes and mocks one of the best virtues of good French writing: painting quickly and truly a new outward but essential relation between things. Good French writing about a sunset or a ploughman, a boulevard café or a street fight, will seize upon a relation between this and that colour in the sky, between the man's plod and his horse's tramp, between house and customer, between street and fighters, and so put it that the merely necessary words prove it to be the one relation we were waiting for that we might see reality. French "artist-writing" seizes upon relations by the thousand, but they are all false. The red sun sets with a last throb like a dying passionate heart.

The lewd ploughshare turns the voluptuous loam with a scream of conquering delight. The grizzly café's maw grinds dipsomaniacs with the white teeth of its marble tables. The chaste street looks blue-eyedly down upon the scum bubbling with spite at its foot. The darling sin of "artist-writing" is the invention of figures which cannot represent the things. The artist in words paints with one violent image which is true; the imitator copies the violence, not the truth. The French artist makes a single and true aspect of a thing seem startlingly new to us; "artist-writing" grubs for new but complicated and untrue ways of looking at the thing.

This is not so much so in bad English writing. The worst is not the most twisted and far-fetched. The reason is that the virtue of the vice is not a common English one; expressing suddenly a violently fresh relation between things is a more French gift. An English equivalent talent would be that of expressing the nicest shades with subtle accuracy and completeness, but this has not notably brought forth bad copyists. Close shades give the imitator much more trouble than clashing colours. There is of course some English "artist-writing," but not much, and it is so raw that the French is almost the real thing beside it, and that it is not an important type of bad English writing. What is that is the easy running machine of which every part has been polished by earlier use. The mechanic has only put the parts together, and when it all goes without a hitch he is proud of it. The French use the word "clichés" ten times more often than we "stereotyped," but the thing is extremely English. The page "reads smoothly," a few shy and lonely words tack one ready-made phrase to the other, the eye hailing so many "familiar land marks" travels quickly to the end, and has understood at a glance what the page was meant to mean. But the page has been a great squandering and slighting of

words. The words have been spoilt and their meaning lost, fewer words husbanded with more care and valued with more deference would have meant more. Thought has been scamped, ready-made phrases dishonoured by use have carried the patchwork writer on, and he finished his mosaic before he thought what the pieces meant to the first man who made them. Words want respect; they serve well the writer who honours them, but they pay out the one who is offhand with them.

The bulk of "serious" English writers, who wish to impart knowledge, and who think of the matter which they have to convey, and the form into which they put it as of two separate things, belong to this class of patchworkers. That is why this kind of work can be classed first as the worst English writing. It exists in French as well, but it is not the type of the worst French writing for two reasons. The "serious" French writer, to begin with, writes more seldom "seriously," and in the second place when he does he is taken less seriously. Piecing together a mosaic of stock phrases less often satisfies him, and he more often understands the use of style. When he does not, he imposes upon people less than he would in England; even popular opinion is more chary of distinguishing between matter and form, and hesitates to judge that a book is instructive because it is badly written.

English political language works havoc in English writing; it is only an example, but it is the chief example of the patchwork of platitudes. French political language is often very bad, but it spoils less French writing than the English spoils English. A bad French writer copies badly the artist in writing, the bad English copies well the mechanic. French journeymen in machine-made political verbiage taint only their natural fellows; the English pervert greenhorns of all sorts. Their public credit is much greater here than there. There they are

kept in a world of their own with which real writers have no acquaintance and their language is not looked upon as a language at all by those who know. A great deal of political word spinning goes on in French, but it has no influence on literature. The equivalent thing here has a recognised standing ; it is the standard style for the ordinary political biography, contemporary sociological study, essays on statesmanship, for the newspaper political leader which retains its uncanny hold upon the British public. A cheap but clear example of the difference between the worst French and the worst English writing is this : the Paris newspaper runs to short stories in the " écriture artiste," the London newspaper in any important moment rises to an able column of patchwork.

The worst French prose is better than the worst English. It can be more violently, but it cannot be as timidly bad ; it is writing gone very wrong, the English is not writing at all. The most virulent French " écriture artiste " is a frantic perversion of the principle that the first thing that matters in writing is how you write ; this startlingly new axiom has not yet been heard of by the worst English writing. The fallacy that matter and form are separable is more English than French. Perhaps, in the art of writing, words are ideas : the French writer has more often thought so than the English.

Can a man have ideas which he cannot, but another could, put into words ? Is there a great mass of men who cannot say what they want, or of men who have nothing to say ? By writing badly does a man prove that what he thinks is not worth writing about, or that whatever he may think he cannot write it ? Can thought fit to be expressed by the art of writing be given, and the ability to express it be denied ? Or does not the want of the ability prove the want of the thought ? Style, then, is thought.

The startling new truth that in judging a written page, the first thing to judge is how it is written, applies not only obviously to the page that means first of all to be a work of the art of writing, but also to the page that means to be something else first of all. The idea that writing is a box into which to put thought, and that the box at the user's choice may be of deal, while the contents are precious stones, is absurd. If words be used to express thought, the words must matter. If lines, colours, shapes, or musical sounds be used, we judge them first : no one dreams of saying " the painting of that picture is bad, the thought in it is good " ; " that sonata is full of thought, but it is bad music." When we say that a piece of music or of painting has ideas badly expressed, we mean that some ideas in the work are well expressed and that the author (we infer) may have had other ideas simultaneously which he failed to express. Yet it is often said of an author, " he has thought of his own, but he has no style." This is a misconception which is much less French than English. Words, unlike colour, line, shape, musical sounds, are used by everybody, and every man thinks he understands them ; they cannot, therefore, be exactly likened to the former, because they are not solely material in the artist's hand. But do they not become such material when used for any writing worthy to be called writing ? Is not then the writer's material equivalent to that of the painter, the musical composer, the sculptor ? The arrangement of words becomes as essential as that of line, colour, shape, sounds. Finally, in real writing, form and matter, style and thought are inseparable. This truism is much more familiar to French than to English writers.

The best French prose and the best English prose are more like than the worst French and English, but they are unlike. The best French prose yet written is the

most simplified, the English is not. An absolutely true outline is the image of the former, not of the latter. The best French prose yet written puts an abstraction completely in the fewest possible words, paints a picture wholly with only just the sufficient touches. Its expression of an abstract thought is perfect: every associated idea that was not essential—let alone an ornament—has been lopped off; not one root upon which the trunk depends has been harmed. We have a skeleton of the tree, but absolutely all of the tree that it is useful for the reasoning eye to see. No other abstract writing equals the French in clearness and precision. No other picturesque writing equals the French in clearness and precision. It draws cheeseparingly, grudging every stroke. One more might add a good detail, but it would overlap and is blotted out: better a blank than a line too much. The picture (it is a steel engraving) is finished the moment we recognise it. If one stroke shows it to us, then one stroke will do, for another might go just too far and slur the outline. We must see the one picture perfectly, but guess at no other. The problem for the best picturesque French writing always is to paint so far and no further, to show us the thing really and no other thing, to call up a true vision, but defined, and the more strongly true that it is the more sharply defined.

The best English prose comes to the thought, and the picture from the opposite end. That we may understand, it does not simplify but complicates. It looks all round the thought, and perceives and describes every byway leading to the thought; the approaches are made familiar to us, we are led step by step, we are insensibly brought to the goal; as for the goal itself, we must make our own last effort to get there, we are never planked down hard upon it. The thought in itself is not clearly said; the aids to it are suggested; when it comes finally

to putting the essential abstraction clearly and finally the best English prose often fails. Even the best English prose is not good at biting out a naked thought with one clear cut line.

It does not put an abstract thought as clearly as the French; it does not draw the same sharp picture, it draws sometimes, but rarely, a more suggestive, if a more blurred. It never attains to the same clearness and precision either in writing where clearness and precision are everything, or in writing where they are not everything. It reflects the English mind, fond of incoherent things and afraid of the composing idea. That English thought derived from reason and English writing that appeals to reason have this double character scarcely needs proof. The English greater liking for induction than for deduction, for working up from facts rather than down from theory is evident. English abstract writing often works up from the facts and stops then short, leaving the theory to grow by itself. The French never does so: it had rather have a theory with not a fact to stand on than no theory; the English, if it had to choose, would prefer facts with no theory to fit them. That in thought derived from feeling and in writing which appeals to feeling, the English mind is also fonder of independent things and more afraid of the organising idea than the French, is less obvious but as true. English writing from imagination follows the same bent as English writing from reason. As the latter starts from disconnected postulates, so the former begins with random details of the picture. If it paints men or a man, it looks not down from the general but up from the particular. A twitch of the man's face, a twist of his gait, a hitch of his clothes, a trick of his speech, a kink in his mind, are first caught and put down. Men together are seen from successive corners of the market-place, a signboard copied here,

another there, the wares of first one counter then another are described, the talk of three gossips set down, then the talk of three more, and of three more after that, one's wife's tale, one husband's tale is told, then another wife's and another husband's. The painting of a sentiment is begun in the same way, from the fringe. The offshoots are shown, the tip of a leaf here and there is drawn minutely, the tree trunk often is left in shadow.

None of the best French writing but what goes the other way about. It seizes the soul of the man or of the crowd first; the silhouette of the man and the crowd come afterwards. The sentiment is expressed first of all, its bye-products are dealt with afterwards. The details painted in have been chosen because they fitted in with the picture, not for their own sake because they suggested a picture. Tricks of character explain the character; the character is not suggested by its tricks. A French Mrs. Micawber (if there could be one), who never would desert Mr. Micawber, would say so because she was Mrs. Micawber; she would not be Mrs. Micawber because she said so. An English Bel Ami (can you imagine one?) would look the Bel Ami to begin with, and after that we might have to guess whether he were the Bel Ami to the core. The best French writing that makes some outward relation between things seem startlingly new gets at that relation from the inside; it was suddenly seen to fit the scheme of the things. The best English writing that is good at subtle shading was attracted by the shading before seeing the thing in itself. The best English writing that is like the French in that it is good at sudden impressions is unlike it because it gets at the impression from the outside, not the inside. Dickens impressionism and Meredith impressionism, which are very different, are yet alike, and both very English in that, the one man hurtling and the other

picking his way, both travel towards the centre of their subject, not from it. The English artist in writing always gives one the idea that his subject is outside him; he chanced upon it, looked round it, and tells us all about it. The French artist did not chance upon his subject, but chose it, perhaps with some care, and his subject has ceased to astonish him when he writes about it. Dickens impressionism is both violently new and violently true, but it is true as fancy is, not as a fact noted down is: it has the truth of poetry. Meredith impressionism is violent subtlety. Neither proceeds by the method of French writing, though Dickens in some ways by his immediateness (an opinion which will revolt many) is more French than Meredith. For both are not logical, but impulsive, and the truth of what they say depends on the truth of their rough and sudden sketches of outline on the one hand, and on the other of their inner fancy; it does not depend upon the truth of an inner structural plan; half of it is in prose the truth of poetry, not the truth of prose.

What sometimes seems to be the sketchiness and skimpiness of French imaginative prose is often found by the discerning eye to be the result of careful building. The same eye will discover that what can be more truly called loose and thin, is on the contrary the redundant suggestiveness of even some of the best English writing. The former may have been too much boiled down, but however dry the extract, there is always some of the beef left in it; the latter may be all trimmings and no meat. Maupassant is sometimes pared and pruned down to a stick, but in Meredith sometimes one cannot see the tree for the leaves. One sometimes wishes M. Anatole France thought as subtly as Mr. Henry James, but one more often wishes Mr. Henry James wrote like M. Anatole France. To suggest is naturally the aim of both writings, but the ways of suggesting are different; at

their best the one does it with the fewest and most careful touches, the other with random but true and delicate dabs. Both have their perils, but the former is on the whole safer. It will never be as dangerous to be barren as it is to be fruitful, never as dangerous to sum up as it is to develop. The worst fate that can happen to synthetic French writing (and it does happen) is that it should make a mountain of a molehill; analytic English writing burrowing here and there may get lost in a rabbit warren. Maupassant and Flaubert are much safer to copy than Dickens and Thackeray, and actually easier to copy well, though perhaps more difficult for the bad copyist.

Fancy may seem easier, but it is more difficult to imitate well than reason. It is only too easy to splash the canvas, but the difficulty is to find the right colours when the painting of the impression is begun from the fringe. If a logical composition be started from, it will at least hang together even if worked out weakly. In impressionism, which is a more English thing than French in writing, though popular opinion often thinks the contrary, and which is met with in English writers who died before the word was invented by the French, half failure is much more fatal than in the writing of reason. Trying to paint like that pure impressionist Dickens, and failing, dabbing the colours on, not instantly right, as he did when he painted Betsy Trotwood, but wrong (as he sometimes did) is an incomparably worse fiasco than attempting to build up a geometrical tale like Maupassant's and not bringing it off. False impressionism is less than nothing; when logical writing is bad, at least the logic of it remains. A bad imitation of Madame Bovary would be a frightful thing, but a bad imitation of "One of our Conquerors" would be worse. Flaubert's elaborate masonry looks more formidable at first to the copyist than Meredith waywardly

throwing his materials together, but let the copyist who has tried give us his opinion.

The best French prose is the best prose, but the best English prose has a strain of poetry in it. None is as true, firm, sharp, neat as the former, and the latter has not yet come near to the same finish. But the best English prose (there is not much of it) is not altogether prose; the best French is solely prose. In English prose at its highest there is that something which carries it yet higher; French prose gets to the summit of prose but not beyond.

Some reflection of national character may be found here. Perhaps we are nearly all of us bad at prose, but a very few of us are good at poetry. Perhaps the French are the only prose writers, and two or three of us are the only poets.

CHILDREN

XIII

CHILDREN

EVEN the extraordinary Englishman who has observed the English has not always perceived that "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking-glass" is almost the most English modern thing ever done, and that no other people could have thought of doing it. Even he has not understood that English children are the only real children and that the English people is the only real child-people. Has he remarked that English child-poetry is the greatest, and that England is the land of nursery rhyme, that our having sung "A Frog he would a-wooing go," and "Cock me carry, Kitty and I," and our being able to say to-day with delight, "'Twas brillig and the slithy toves" or "I doubt it, said the carpenter," is important? In folklore English nursery rhyme holds a great place; more than that, it is not past but present.

The English child is the only real child that has its own world, from which grown-ups are banned. The English nursery is a very fine English thing. It is a serious and earnest world which no one who is not serious can enter. The absurdities of adults must cease at the threshold; a grown-up can come in only if he drops them and is grave. When doggie who has been sitting stiffly these three weeks in his same chair is remembered and given a bun, the nursery is not making believe; it had forgotten doggie and now suddenly makes the right amends. The doggie who can walk and talk and make the bun disappear is not really different from the doggie who can only sit stiffly and stare at the bun; both must have the bun. The stuff doggie, having

been offered the bun, is unmoved. "This doggie no alive, Papa?" He has to agree. "Papa, why no make this doggie alive?" Ah, why? What are you going to bed with to-night? "Going bed wiv el'phant." This has been decided beyond question. What are *you* going to bed with? "Torts." To-night is for the live tortoise and the stuff elephant; another may be for "nuvver el'phant," hence a fight, as there is only one. At 3 A.M. "Nurse, lobster in bed." "Go to sleep. Lobsters *never* come into beds." "Nurs—ee, no stay in bed, lobster there." Once a week for two months the nursery, never having seen, or to any one's knowledge heard of, a lobster, dreams that it is in bed with one. Four year old gets up first, walks to three year old, wakes him and says: "Want no fighting to-day." Why especially to-day? But the determination fell through. Four year old comes home with the news that he has found four little sisters in a house quite near. All four are called Maud. Three year old has four little sisters too, other ones. All these four are called Ann.

The gravity of the English child is a precious thing, and perhaps especially English. The English child of two gravely walking up to his father to shake hands, with "goo'-bye," before going out with nurse, is very delightful. The father, if he is a decent father, shakes hands as gravely, and hopes the walk will be a pleasant one. The nursery is its own world, parents and other grown-ups enter there by leave, not by right. Perhaps only English parents feel that really. Peter, who is seven, has his own garden plot. His sisters set pinks in theirs; he digs for a treasure in his. Almost every morning his father, being a decent father, asks Peter whether he has hopes of finding the treasure shortly. Some mornings Peter is hopeful, others gloomy. Peter and his father perhaps are only English.

The child's imagination is almost the whole child,

and no one who cannot share it can know the child. The child's laugh is precious, but easy to understand. When not to laugh is a harder knowledge ; to laugh at a child is of course unforgiven. The old saying, in a deeper sense than it is usually taken in, is always true ; the real reverence due to children includes a restraint in their parents. They can hardly walk before they command wonderfully respect for their own small souls. With children it is the wrong thing to be hail-fellow-well-met ; they cannot do without deference, and especially hate jocular familiarity. The right sort of parents feel awe inwardly before their children, and outwardly show some shyness towards them. Perhaps this shade of restraint between parents and children is particularly English, and it is only English fathers that would not presume upon a child of three, and only English children that, little animals though they be, just perceive that they are already little persons for their father. The French father and mother, especially the mother, are admirable, but that one quality of restraint is what they lack.

There is perhaps no mother exactly like the French mother in the world. It is she who really feels, what G. K. Chesterton said somewhere, that birth already is a separation. She yearns to make her child flesh of her flesh again ; she is always trying to bridge over the separation. Her child still is herself, she never really is delivered of it. She is not self-sacrificing, devoted, tender, for one is not any of these things to a limb of one's own body. She and her child are to her the same thing. It is only the child that may go from her and amaze her, she is always with her child. A maniac of a Paris murderer was tracked, trapped and killed in a hole like a rat, with all the world watching ; a brutal Paris journalist interviewed his mother, and she said : " After all, he was my son." If I had dared, I would

have spoken with her. She was an old, dried-up, back-broken workwoman. It was equally typical of French things that she should have been "interviewed," and that she should have said only "he was my son." The tragic mother of a wild murderer did not fall below French motherhood. This in more peaceful ways is a lifelong identification. To her death the French mother is never free of her child. She never thinks, "My son is settled, my daughter married, my duty by them is done." The "belle mère" is a touching character. The mother-in-law who is her daughter's jolly elder sister, meets her out, and asks her down in a week-end party, would be unnatural in France. Her son, the French mother watches over in manhood exactly as when she nursed him. She learns to know for his sake the world which she never knew, she makes his career for him even more than his father does, and she would not dream of being ashamed of choosing his mistress for him if necessary. She is the perfect mother—from motherhood's point of view. Many English mothers scatter their children about the world and may never see them again. With some of them the instinct of motherhood is certainly not passionate. A few recall the perfect motherhood, while it lasts, of animals who, when motherhood is over, cease to know their offspring from the rest of their kind. But, from childhood's point of view, the French mother is not quite perfect.

Her love and her child's love is perfect, no love is as perfect. It is the deepest feeling of all in French life, and it is a noble element. It has no self-consciousness and is blank to irony. It could be taken as a pattern without harm: a mother's love never did any, and a "mother's boy" does not go wrong because he is one. But the most passionate love can exist without respect, and it is some respect that French parental love lacks, respect for the child's small personality coming into its

own new world. The best French upbringing is wanting in a shade of such respect, the worst English upbringing is not entirely without it. The worst brought up English child is a dragged up lout, the worst brought up French child is a toy. Father and mother play with it adoringly, neither ever dreams that it was born for anything except their own pleasure, they do not spoil it, because a spoilt child is a nuisance even to its own parents, but they train it to amuse them : it learns tricks like a poodle, it says pretty and sharp things, it soon is a little man or woman of the world, dressed like one, and innocently speaking like one—and childhood is blasphemed. The most charming French child has suffered some taint from such irreverence. It is exquisitely grave and sweet and gay—and for the Première Communion it writes out the list of its sins on scraps of paper, and parents are amused, never dreaming that to exact the confession from a child of seven is a sin against the child. There is something deeply terrible in being amused at a child's innocence. I have found hardly a French parent who felt that strongly, and hardly an English one who did not. The most charming child quickly learns that it amuses in some way it cannot understand, and from thence to slyness is easy. The French child is all charming life and fun—and it finds itself applauded and plays to the gallery. Parents irreverently sit round and clap, and the child is made a monkey of. The most atrocious English small boy, as devastating and conscienceless as a fox terrier pup, cannot by the wildest imagination be supposed to be self-conscious; the most horrid English little girl, sneaky and snappish, will most likely not trade on her own innocence : both are vilely brought up, yet in a rough way their childhood has been respected. The most careful French parents—and they are the pattern of forethought and carefulness—may lapse from that reverence.

Is the French mind really alien from the mind of childhood, and is the English mind in essential sympathy with it ? There are almost no French real nursery rhymes, there are almost no French real nursery tales, there is absolutely no French nonsense verse. I wonder that no French philosopher has with amazement thought of this. There is no French Humpty Dumpty, no pig that went to market, no house that Jack built, no old Woman who lived in a shoe, no Mother Hubbard, no man who had a little gun, no Baby Bunting, and there is left to-day only Cadet Roussel and his three hats, the Bridge of Avignon, Malbrouk s'en va-t-en guerre, and that is almost all, and all three have a certain sharp definiteness, and one of them, the third, a dramatic sense, which are not what childhood wants. The tales told for French children by French writers for childhood like Madame de Ségur are the negation of all that childhood wants, and Miss Edgeworth beside them was a genius in understanding the child. French children have to be fed (for they have a natural appetite) on English stories with English pictures, or on that sole genius Hans Andersen, the only modern creator of folklore. The French philosopher does not seem to have thought over the extraordinary fact that nonsense verse in French is impossible. Like any other real child the French child takes a delight in talking nonsense and makes long and absorbing speeches in words of his own invention ; no French writer has taken them down. In modern times only Lewis Carroll has, and he remains the greatest genius of childlore. But the Duchess, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the White Rabbit, the White Knight, and the Red Queen could not be French —and yet the French child, like any real child, understands them when introduced and knows them for real childworld persons. Beside them the persons of French imitation folk stories, of La Fontaine's adapted fables

for instance, are horribly perfect, polished and reasonable. The Dormouse and the Mad Hatter are infinitely nearer to the child of any nation than the Cigale and the Fourmi, the Renard and the Corbeau, or Perrault's Pierrette with the milk pot. In these is a stiff reason exquisitely expressed, in those, however cloudily put, a wild imagination. The French child has the same imagination as other children, but his own purveyors do not satisfy it. Perhaps the French mind cannot satisfy its child mind. I defy any one to turn into French the smile of the Cheshire Cat. Yet I have noticed yearnings in French children which only the Cheshire Cat's smile would have really satisfied. Is the bane of the French mind its being too grown up?

The English people is the only real child-people, the French is the most grown-up. It is always amusing to hear the ingenuous English tourist saying that the French chatter like children. The most ingenuous French is not conversely impressed by our maturity. Beside the French we shall always seem immature; looking at us or talking to us they will always call us young, our manner and our conversation will never seem to them finished. We have an awkwardness which if they ever had it they lost at seventeen, they an assurance which we shall never win. We die still doubting what it all means, and they knew what it meant when they first began to live. Our mind is incomparably less sure of itself than theirs, and undoubtedly less resolute. One of its chief characteristics is its repugnance for thinking a thing out to the end. The first impulse of the French mind carries it past shrinking on the brink. Traversing again the ground over which we have travelled, one is always amazed how often our mind has suspended its judgment, and the French has settled everything to its own satisfaction. The almost invariable

attitudes are of the one question and of the other answer. We are still everywhere asking, the French always have a reply ready. We feel boys beside them when they have an answer pat for all we ask. They have, indeed, thought out their answers well. They have on an average sized up the world more thoroughly than we have. Whichever way we turn, we shall not find that we have seen one aspect of life which has escaped them, but in whatever nook we peer they have looked also, usually before us, and usually with more complete scrutiny. Whatever general ideas we conceive, the French mind will be familiar with them already. The individual among us will always be found to have conceived fewer general ideas than the equivalent Frenchman. Any particular aspect of things the general English mind will always be found to have observed less completely and finally. The individual Englishman always betrays some incompleteness of thinking beside the finite thought of his French peer. The English mind always seems younger than the French mind. I have often thought that nothing shows better the characteristics, the virtues, and the shortcomings of the English and French minds than the behaviour of both towards childhood. There is always a trace of condescension in the French attitude, some amazement in the English ; the one always implies some consciousness of world knowledge which the child will have to learn, the other seems always to be saying, How shall we teach the child to know a world which we don't know ? The French mind thinks first of all, This mite will become a man and must be fitted for our world ; the English wonders, What new creature have we brought into what world ? Nothing shows more clearly French certainty and English doubt. The French adult deliberately makes the world for the French child, an at least plausible and workable world, the English

casts wild looks round and shirks the double riddle, of the world and of the child. The French father creates a working system of life, and puts his son into it. The English father puts his son into an English public school. The fine make believe of the latter will be the boy's safeguard. The admirable conventions of the English public school will enable the son and the father to avoid real problems. The journey after that for the boy will be a journey who knows whither ? But at least the father will feel that he is safely started, and that as he has been supplied with English traditions, nothing that the wit of man can devise has been spared to equip him for his travels. In reality the English boy's departure, with all its elaborate kit of character drill, is much more a dash into the unknown than the French boy's. The safeguards provided by the English public school against the real problems of life keep the boy beautifully fresh. The traditions serve not to show him the way but to prevent him looking. The time may never come for him to have to see for himself, but if it does come, he is in a new world, gazing with a " wild surmise." The English character sympathises deeply by instinct with the spontaneity of childhood. The ordinary Englishman unconsciously shares the child's wonder and feels close to the wondering child. I question whether the Frenchman ever does. The English language feels that it is close to the child's language, the French certainly does not. The extraordinary proof of this is that the child's tongue does not disfigure English but disfigures French. Child English is never un-English and generally delightful ; child French almost always goes against the grain of the French language. Few of the characteristic beauties of French remain in child French, many peculiar beauties of English are as clear to hear in child English as in grown-up English. To be at its

best the French language must always remain self-conscious, and that best is the very best of the kind. Child English is the best child language and English poets' dreams are the greatest.

"MEN"

XIV

"MEN"

THE English boy who goes up to the 'Varsity instantly becomes a "man"; there are no French boys and "men": the French public schoolboy is a "young man," the French undergraduate a "young man." There is something deliciously fresh and rash about the name of "men," which the French who know of it must wish they had. But they have their own name, if not quite so young a one,—the "jeunes." That the "jeunes" are old and that the "men" are boys is easy at once to say, but is less true than is often supposed. They have much thinking in common, less living. There is great kinship, as well as great distance, between them. They are nearer though different in their ideas, and more apart in their outlook upon life, as far as two pairs of twenty year old eyes can look differently upon life.

The kinship of intelligent French and English youth does not come only from their youth and intelligence. They think together more closely than any young minds of different nations, who think together only because they are young and because they think. They have been bred and drilled into different ways of thought, but when they attempt faintly to think for themselves, they find in each other astonishing comradeship. A brand-new B.A. going in for the Church, and a just fledged "professor" from the Ecole Normale look like the contraries of one another in manner, speech and ideas. A graduate of last year taking to writing, and a "jeune" poet who has just taken his Licence ès Lettres seem incommensurable. Put each two together

properly, and the contact will be extraordinarily close. The young intelligences of France and England have more in common than those of any two other countries. They have a certain breadth, depth and perspective which no other two modern civilisations have yet taught. Both have the past and both have the future, and both believe in the present. They look with greater ease at the world of ideas than any other young intelligences ; they have more they can leave to each other unsaid, they start from a further beginning, and they start together. They both have the greatest foundations in to-day's world to build upon, and neither has lost the builder's spirit. An English boy and a French boy who think, must feel some enthusiasm on meeting and telling each other their thoughts, and they do : the two ripest but still freshest civilisations of the modern world do come together often in these boys' meetings, when "jeune" meets "man."

Both nations should think more about this. Most thinking young Frenchmen will tell you that outside their own people they have nowhere found themselves as much at home intelligently as among Englishmen of their own age and thoughtfulness. It is a superficial mistake to imagine that the thinking young Frenchman looks upon himself as a Latin. He seldom feels closely in touch with his Italian or Spanish equal. He feels himself much more of a mixture, with some Northern dream dashing Latin Logic—and making, he perhaps intimately believes, French reason. From the German, not only facts keep him always more or less aloof, but also thoughts, although they have often been almost brothers in mind at moments, in spite of the facts.

The modern facts between French and English have often been bitter, the young French and English minds have never been estranged. When we roared over Fashoda and the French, after roaring back, gave in,

the "jeune" did not the less find his fellow in the "man" from England. He has often told me that however startling differences seemed to him, he yet could argue best with his English companion—and that is the true test. He felt the young Englishman (when the young Englishman does think) to be his most inspiring answerer: I think we can return him the compliment. Perhaps neither nation yet understands sufficiently well how much this means; that young thinking France and young thinking England should feel that they can hammer ideas better with each other than with anybody else is an important fact for the world.

Intelligent young Italy has a certain garishness which gets on French nerves—much more than it does on ours; intelligent young Germany, with all its strange complication, still in the long run gushes as in the old days; intelligent young Russia is violently decadent, and would be wholly out of date in Paris to-day; intelligent young America the French "jeune" cannot distinguish from England; only in the Anglo-Saxon intelligent youth the "jeune" finds really that intellectual ease and intellectual venturesomeness, that boldness and that safety, which appeal to him, the skill at playing to wild limits with ideas, but the nerve that keeps dreams sane, the sincerity of enthusiasm tempered by the saving grace of irony.

The "jeune" from France and the "man" from England are the best fighters in the world. They have a great deal to fight about. Each having agreed that he would rather fight the other than anybody else in the world, they then do fight.

Life most parts them, and they would fight most about life, if youth were given to much fighting about life, but they do fight about ideas also. Very much in science, much less in Art, a good deal in philosophy,

they announce national character. Our national bent for rule of thumb comes out very remarkably in our youth; French theorism is prominent in theirs, but that is less surprising. It is natural for young men to prefer deduction; ours are perhaps alone, because they do not. Every one who has been able to observe them from the outside has noted that in them. The few English minds that reasoned *à priori* in youth remember how lonely they felt. The lad who laid down a law upon one observed fact, if he put his one fact cogently, easily beat him who knew he was right because he reasoned from right abstract premises. The battle would go the same way probably in the field of the men of forty, but it is unnatural everywhere, except in England, to win such victories at two-and-twenty. I doubt that we usually understand this peculiarity of our youth. The English people takes great pride in managing its public affairs by rule of thumb, but does not understand how remarkably this national characteristic is shown in its young reasoners. Realism in life has no connection with reasoning by induction, and the young Englishman has no conception of what the former is; but his dislike for abstract argument in debate is almost invariable. In scientific thought the young Frenchman has an almost invariable contempt for the concrete. This is a national characteristic in him, and also a natural one. The young mind beginning to reason naturally glories in abstract logic, it is the young English mind that is unnatural, being already a pragmatist. Confront the French "jeune" and the English "man" in science; the former will have as much contempt for applied science as the metaphysician for Kantian Practical Reason, the latter in the midst of Transcendent Mathematics will keep an eye on practical Physics. The French lead the world in

theoretical mathematics, the French "jeune" takes some pride in this, few young Englishmen would. The Frenchman who made motors and drove them, and make aeroplanes and fly in them are not the same "jeunes" who sneer at applied science; but the contempt for the concrete has not harmed the accomplishment, theory has not hurt practice. It is not all gain for the young Englishman to upset the law of nature and be no theorist, even when he begins to think.

In art French and English youth are much less national, and often in fact anti-national. The national characters they do announce are obvious to the superficial observer. Art, finding a legitimate place more easily in the French scheme of the world than in the English, commands a more natural and familiar respect from French than from English youth. The latter throws out some adventurous and lively tentacles of knowledge and feeling into curious corners of Art. But it is a less easy traveller over the whole field, and at the same time it sets less store by the journey. The most dryly scientific French youth acknowledges that art exists, and that writing even science is an art. Even intelligent and thinking English youth sometimes is unaware that art has any importance at all in the world. This difference any one can see. Other differences to be more closely observed are not national, but often reciprocally anti-national. Neither the reason and realism of French art are markedly announced by French youth, nor the fancy and feeling of English art by English youth.

If ever the intelligent French mind put fancy before realism in art, it is at twenty; and at twenty the intelligent English mind will in art often put reason before feeling. The Englishman learns to know Shakespeare, the Frenchman to know Racine.

When both literary critics are young (if both are intelligent and well taught) the chances are that the first likes Racine better than he will in after years, and that the second worships Shakespeare with an enthusiasm destined to cool. On questions of form in art it is more likely the young Englishman will be the stickler, and the French "jeune" loftily lax; it will be the former who will praise the perfect roundel and ballad and sonnet, and the latter who will spurn technique fettering dreams. It is at forty that the Frenchman who was a real "jeune" comes round to saying over Hérédia's "Antony and Cleopatra" sonnet, and at forty that the Englishman, who was a real "man," falls back finally on words like, "Full fathom five my father lies." At twenty the English mind wants Rostand and Austin Dobson, the French Blake and Mallarmé.

The philosophy of the "jeune" and of the "man"! Immense subject—impossible to sum up. Let us say that the latter is practical and mystical, the former theoretical and not mystical. The "jeune" would—or once would—be a mystic, but he has it not in the blood; the "man," the moment he philosophises, must be mysterious. I defy the two, arguing metaphysics together, not to be driven at last, partly by contradictoriness no doubt, the one to some sort of rationalism, the other to some sort of "credo quia absurdum." The theorism and practical sense of the two agree, of course, well with their respective final positions. It is as obvious that the practical man is, if he thinks, the mystic as that the theorist is the reasoner. This difference, as far as one can tell, seems to be growing: the "jeune," notwithstanding—or because of—politico-religious revivals, is making scantier attempts to be mystical than he did, and the "man" looks like becoming more mystical every day. The 'Varsity has

voted positivism bad form, so has the Latin Quarter; but the latter builds its faith more than ever upon reason, and the former, I understand, finds reason a shiftier quicksand to build on than ever. Professor Bergson undermines reason because he philosophises in France; in England he might be tempted to show up feeling, which he would do with equal acuteness. In this way French and English youth, after all, come round to be national again. Apart from passing fashions, the two, when reaching " to the ends of being," will always clutch for their last straw—the one at reason, the other at feeling.

Taken all round, French " jeunes " cling more intelligently to reason than English " men " stick to feeling. In contemporary history, the " jeunes " of 1890, soon after they began to be called " jeunes," and their heirs of 1910, between them, covered much ground. In the twenty years French youth passed from symbolism to neo-classicism, from mysticism to political Roman Catholicism, from rebellious criticism and fervent blasphemy to a state of mind (described by an heir of 1912) " unwrung by any throes of metaphysical anxiety," and no longer troubled " by the problems of the existence of God and of human fate." In the nineties it would have been unthinkable that a young Frenchman should not be troubled by the problem of the existence of God. In the nineteen tens he was either a disciplined Churchman or, as in polite society, in the same heir's words, " did not wish to hear religion talked about." His poetry passed from one that claimed its right to question all the world to one that claimed simply to make up a new French lyricism with what was best worth preserving in French symbolism —Romanticism and Classicism. His social thought also passed from great questioning to much acceptance, and from revolt to something almost like " Slave

morality." The evolution of French "jeunes" in a quarter of a century, since they were first called "jeunes," was perhaps the most remarkable mental and collective change ever observed. To one looking on, a good deal of philosophy seemed to have been lost, while some immediate and practical gain seemed to have been won, for the French youth that no longer wanted "religion talked about" was the French youth that helped to back the country in political crises of the moment. But whether good or bad, whether finally productive or barren, the change was an intelligent one—that is to say, worked by the intelligence. Was there any corresponding evolution among English "men"? The worst thing one could say of them is that there had been none; the best thing one can say, I am afraid, is that they faintly traced a parallel. The English contemporaries of the French "jeunes" invented no ideas that France had not invented before them. They invented sometimes admirable expression, but the thing expressed had been formed for them before. Decadentism, symbolism, like contemporary French "naturalism" (which never had its "jeunes"), a Romanticism which called itself realism, were all echoed well in England; but the first note of them was never sounded there. Decadentism in art, for instance, found sometimes greater artists in England than in France, like Aubrey Beardsley; but it was always expressing ideas the French had thought of. French naturalism, again, though it had no "jeunes" in France, found them in England, and they were good at it; but it remained French in temper all the same. A certain English humour, satire, and whimsicalness remains always essentially English; but it is not the spirit that makes a school—at all events a young school—certainly not one that makes a school for remaking the world. French mystic symbolism was

echoed in England, and was taken up with natural kindness by the natural mystic temper of the English nation; but here, again, it was the French "jeune" who gave the impulse for the revival—or set the fashion. Had England, as France, heirs of the "jeunes," "no longer troubled by the problem of the existence of God"? If so, the French "jeune" once more showed the way.

The "man" and the "jeune" are much more different in their behaviour towards life than in their behaviour towards ideas. In fact, they look almost as differently towards life as two pairs of twenty-year-old eyes can. The chief difference is that the "man" does not know he is looking at life, and that the "jeune" does. The former looks wildly and gaily round him, wonders with his feelings, not his reason, what it is all about, tries to take in as much of it as he can, and does not heed what it will all take him to: he is the real boy, the latter rarely has his boyishness. The "man" is fresher than the "jeune." An English boy, whom I knew exceedingly well when we were twenty, has a book of verse in his bookcase now which the "jeune" author of the same age gave him with the dedication: "To ——, for his freshness." The boy had never once thought how fresh he was, the "jeune" had proved himself not to have the same freshness. Blond, blue-eyed, innocent intelligence may not understand that it is a revelation to others. The young intelligence that does not know itself is the most delightful of young intelligences. The "man" looks with this freshness at life, and has not the least idea what he is looking at. Lectures, games, boating Saturdays, "man-talks," taking girls out—it never occurs to him to have the slightest idea what it will all lead to. If one asked him about his life (which is absurd) he would say that he was supposed to be going into the Church, or the

Civil Service, or the Foreign Office, or to be coming into something. The rest of his life he would not dream of thinking about, and he would look blank at being told that the girl he takes out might be as much a matter of life as the career he embraces. The "jeune" does know he is looking at life.

Sometimes he seems to us to be looking at it only too knowingly. The fable of Bohemian carelessness in the Latin Quarter never, I believe, was true. Oxford is much more the place that thinks not of the morrow. The "jeune" who has never tried to map out his life is rare, and not only his career, but all his life. A house-surgeon of twenty-seven, six months before taking his doctor's degree, asked a marriage-making old maid to find him a tall, slim, dark, clear-complexioned bride with £6,000, ascertaining first of all in which French country town she would prefer to settle. Intending to practise in a provincial town, he wished before buying a practice and taking a wife, to be assured that the place of the former, which he had not yet chosen would not be distasteful to the latter, whom he had not yet chosen either. Ought we to see only the comic side of such extreme forethought? I never heard whether the doctor found a bride. If so, it is just as likely they lived happily ever afterwards. His example was a counsel of perfection, which most of his fellows fall short of, but they very seldom butt haphazard into life after the English way. They lay some plans not only for to-morrow, but for to-day. To-morrow—at thirty—they will marry, and they may already know who the girl will be, or at least where to look for her. For to-day they plan so much work, so much fun—and so much sex. They don't deny themselves the work, they don't shirk the fun; they portion out the love also. They know what they must do to get on, and they know how much they can play; they know what woman must mean

to them. They have no illusions for to-day (even if they have any for to-morrow) and they are merely sure that sex is, like fun or work, a thing there is no shirking. They just choose mistresses on lease, and the mistresses know pretty well within a year or two how long the lease will be. It is all plain, clear and reasonable—and we call it brutal: we half pretend to believe, and half do believe it brutal. The "jeune" considers it the only clean and intelligent adjustment of nature and civilisation.

Sex is what the "jeune" and the "man" in life most split on. I think we have to acknowledge that this difference takes the former further than the latter away from the normal mean. The "jeune's" behaviour towards sex will be more generally accepted the world over as natural than the "man's." The young Englishman is an interesting alloy of chastity and lewdness, tenderness and roughness, shyness and brutality, callowness and cynicism, heedless bounty and sharp callousness. The young Frenchman offers no such wide extremes. It is impossible to imagine him as generous, as innocent, as backward, as delicate, as pure with women, as the young Englishman. He would never put up with a quarter as much as, without thinking, the latter does. A type of Englishwoman which has a delicious name in English slang has no name in French, solely because it does not exist in France. The "jeune" is not nearly kind or simple or timid enough to let himself be teased. The cleverest girl had better not try aught on with him. He met his first mistress while the English boy was still almost a child, "and he learnt to know women from her"—once for all, apparently. The Englishman often never learns at all, the English boy certainly never knows. The English girl, either the pure or the other, always knows more than he, each in her own way. He is led easily by either to different

ends. For any one interested in human nature the British barmaid is one of the most absorbing and startling studies possible. She rouses the utmost astonishment and commands the utmost admiration. Compared with her the British young man is feeble. Many ethnologists, I suppose, must have asked themselves why there are no barmaids in France : the reason of course is that the French young man is not ingenuous enough. Many other ethnologists or the same must have noted that it is impossible to translate " walking-out " into French ; the French young man does not walk—or drive—out, the French girl does not ask him to ; that is the sum of it.

The " man " does not look sexual instinct in the face. He is afraid to think soberly of its plain facts. He has invented a dozen different ways of not looking straight at it. He is a master of all its make-believes and skirmishes : he discovered " spooning," and can give points to any at that. He secretly understands, but is ashamed; he therefore half believes that the means are right but the natural end wrong. It remained for a French novelist to dot the i's for him, and to coin out of the " man's " feminine experience, the brutally precise name of *demi-vierge*. She finds the English boy more honestly shy and more honestly chaste than she is ; she does not find the French so. He may be a monk by temperament; if not, he is always something of a realist in his affections: he never shrinks from knowing what his senses mean to him. On a higher plane, when true sentiment enters into the game and it becomes a high and splendid pastime, the two boys are still kept in the same way apart. The one trembles at his boldness, the other never doubts that the end he wants is right ; the one half fears, the other welcomes realities ; the one puts woman on a pedestal and is almost disappointed to find she is flesh, the other's best hope is to make that discovery

and he worships her in his arms. Every one of course says that in the French the senses are stronger, but this is firstly a shallow, and secondly a false explanation. The young Frenchman is not the slave of his senses, the young Englishman is exactly as sensual as he. The former can be tender, shy, chaste, the latter is no faint heart; but the one, whatever coward love may make of him, still looks reality in the face, the other, be he ever so bold, never bluntly tells himself the facts. There is a perhaps morbid delicacy which remains English. Some bloom of the utmost fineness is perhaps always wanting in French loves, however tender and fine. But the French loves nearer the earth may be more wholesome.

But the "man" is a strange alloy, the other metal in him is remarkably different. Few can have failed to note what a brute the innocent boy can become. The realistic "jeune" drunk at the d'Harcourt on New Year's Eve is then polished by his side. He is sometimes to be seen stamping through that very d'Harcourt like a savage, and the "jeune" and the "jeune's" girls are shocked. He does not understand that in France even among drunken students and prostitutes it is possible to go too far, and the thought suddenly overwhelms his sober countryman looking on that among these he really must seem to be a savage from the North let loose in an anciently polished world. We pooh-pooh under ordinary circumstances such French ideas, and set them down to French insularity; but the English young man gaily trying to do in Paris as he thinks Paris does, forces us to see some truth in them. Perhaps it may also have been observed by some moralists that there is no youth that behaves worse to its "unfortunates" than the English (except the German), and that the young Frenchman at his wildest preserves some shade of respect for all women, whereas

the young Englishman sometimes loses all. The public woman in London is to be seen any night in bars suffering with resigned apathy indignities which the lowest Frenchwoman would stab a man with her hatpin rather than put up with. The unfortunate Englishwoman takes it to be all in her night's work. The same young, shy, tender, chaste Englishman, wrought to the pitch, joins in the baiting, as being part of his night out. The same cynical young Frenchman, who deliberately hires a mistress on lease, will yet make a common strumpet in a bar feel that she is a woman, "of the sex to which he owes his mother," in the exquisitely absurd old phrase of French melodrama.

Some of us have noted this good trait in the French people, that it treats its prostitutes decently, and this bad one in the English, that it is capable of brutality towards its prostitutes. The "man" wakes up remorseful, and takes up chaste, tender, unreal flirtations again with a chastened spirit. The "jeune" does not wake up sorry, because a little of la noce is in his curriculum, and takes up no thread of platonic entanglements, because he knows he is to meet his mistress Tuesday next at 11.45 for lunch and the day.

On the whole the "jeune" is a reasonable creature in his living and in his thinking, the "man" a creature of fancy. The former is never quite free from the mad ambition to balance his universe, the latter is in his heart persuaded that there is no balance. What one likes the "jeune" for is that he thinks he knows whither he is going—what one likes in the "man" is that he knows he does not know where he is going to.

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